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BCM #6 Introduction by Rich Johnston

Two nights ago (when writing this) I was in the pub. It is only a week-and-a-bit until I'll be flying to San Diego Comic Con. Now, by the time you read this, that will all be old news. You'll know who announced what, which books JMS is writing for Dynamite, the high concept behind Marvel's new Inhumans book, and exactly what Superwoman did to Nightwing. You'll know who fought whom, who slagged off whom, who lived, who died. But right now, for me, is the great unknown. I will have around twenty writers for Bleeding Cool at the show, running around like blue-arsed flies. No one will get enough sleep, no one will get enough right, and someone will sleep with someone they really shouldn't have. It's a delicious Schrödinger's Cat of possibilities, but to you it's sloppy seconds and you're already seeing PR for New York Comic Con.

It's the cycle of the comics industry, fed by the monthly churn of direct market solicitation, and copied by the majority of the digital comics market. Those new Marvel weekly digital Infinite Comics added to projects like Bryan K Vaughan and Marcos Martin's *Private Eye* give the idea of how things might change. What if the three-months-in-advance, Wednesday on-sale no longer becomes the focus? What will I write about then?

Comics, I guess.

Contents

002 LIFE IN THE GUTTERS
By Rich Johnston

005 SONS OF ANARCHY: BOOM! STUDIOS' GOLDEN TICKET
by Rich Handley

011 THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN VERSUS HALL H
by Brendon Connelly

016 POWERPUFF GIRLS: THE GIRLS ARE BACK IN TOWN
by Dan Wickline

021 THE PULL LIST
by James Kuhoric

026 GETTING INTO CHARACTER: COSPLAYING ROUNDTABLE
by Rich Handley

042 PLANTING THE SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION
by James Kuhoric

047 RUSH: WRITING THE PLAYBOY RACER
by Brendon Connelly

051 VALIANT'S NEW UNITY
by James Kuhoric

056 WHAT IF...?
by Rich Johnston

063 MARS ATTACKS JUDGE DREDD
by Gavin Lees

068 KIERON GILLEN INTERVIEW
by Gavin Lees

081 BOOM! MEETS ARCHAIA
Matt Gagnon & Stephen Christy

087 IRON MAN 3 SPECIAL FEATURES
by Brendon Connelly

090 TRISH OUT OF WATER
by Dan Wickline

094 VINTAGE PAPER CHASE
Mark Seifert & William Christensen

096 FIVE HOT COMICS, AND FIVE THAT MIGHT BE
by Rich Johnston

098 PRICE GUIDE
for Collectors and Sellers

104 BLEEDING COOL DIRECTORY
Retailer List

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LIFE IN THE GUTTERS
By Rich Johnston

I am tired. Really tired. My fingers hurt when I type, my eyelids are heavy, and it's ten in the morning. Welcome to Comic Con jet lag. See, for me, San Diego Comic Con was just a week ago... a week? How is that even possible? But it's true. For me, that's eight hours difference. New Yorkers complain of the three hours, for them staying up until two in the morning, is like staying up until five! A real night out, like when they were in college. For me, it's like staying up until ten in the morning, with a full day's work ahead. It's a killer.

By the time you read this, I may have just recovered. I used to be able to shrug it off in a day or two, but now? Not a chance. It's with me for weeks, hanging around my neck trying to choke me with its time delay antics. And then, when it is time for me to actually go to bed, that's when I find myself staring at the ceiling, counting the cobwebs. So I get up, potter around a bit, write until four in the morning, three hours until the kids wake me up.

Then it starts all over again.

Most British comic book creators manage this by self-medication, by which I mean drinking. Red Bull and vodka when they land on the West Coast, coffee in the morning, sunglasses, and a surly attitude for the rest of the show (until they get back to the bar and they're the life and soul of the party) and then a few weeks sleeping on the drawing board/keyboard when they return. I envy them, I'll be up at five AM writing and wondering how much I can mix sleep deprivation with a massively increased Comic Con work flow before my body actually shuts down. For sustenance, shovelling a peanut/raisin mix into my mouth while working seems to help. Or at least put off the inevitable.

It all starts so well. I land on the

Tuesday or Wednesday, all fresh and inspired. I've had an hour's sleep on the plane, watched a few very bad movies, read a few very good comics, and I'm all hyper. But the day drags and I get an early night.

Then I wake at two in the morning as my body screams at me that it's actually ten in the morning and I'm late for life. I try and persuade it otherwise, but by four I'm fighting a dying cause, so I get to work and start writing. The next day, the show is in full gear and I will have spent the day running around carrying a laptop and writing on the go. And yet, I'll be in the bar chatting until two. Exhausted, I will definitely get some sleep, right?

I wake at four, my body screaming that it's noon and please, for all that is holy, I need to get up. I look at some hastily scrawled notes from the bar and start writing.

By the Saturday I'm manic. Seriously, if there's anything you want to pitch me, wait till Saturday and I'll agree to anything. Anything you want me to sign, drink, marry, that's the peak moment. I have agreed to some very silly things and have probably subjected you to them. Apologies.

By Sunday, I've managed to get a grip on things. I'm still tired but I'm now waking up at six in the morning after getting a full four hours sleep. I'm relatively saner; I've started to understand my world and my place in it. I'm ready to do business.

Then I fly home and it starts all over again, but this time takes me two weeks to cycle the time out.

Eventually I will win. In a week's time, I should have it in the bag, wrestled Comic Con sleep depravity to the ground and stand over it victorious, probably brandishing some kind of broadsword.

Just in time for New York Comic Con.

Five hours. I can do five hours. Five hours is nothing. Unless for, some reason, I

decide to stay up into three in the morning. Again.

I'm going to, aren't I?

If you see me at the show, please, bring me a pillow...

Got a tip for Rich? You can contact him, or any Bleeding Cool contributor, with story tips, comments, questions, or to ask about advertising at: ***BleedingCool.com/contact***

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SONS OF ANARCHY:
BOOM! STUDIOS' GOLDEN TICKET
by Rich Handley

For the past five years, FX has wowed audiences with *Sons of Anarchy*, its television series about an outlaw motorcycle club based in the fictional California town of Charming. The show—FX's highest-rated series to date, starring *Queer as Folk*'s Charlie Hunnam as Jackson "Jax" Teller—has been a huge success for the Fox Entertainment Group. The program has earned wide acclaim from viewers and critics alike for its dramatic storytelling, which has been compared to a number of classic works, from *Hamlet* to *The Godfather*.

Sons of Anarchy, created by Kurt Sutter, will begin its sixth season in September 2013, with a seventh and final season slated to air next year. Coinciding with the new episodes, BOOM! Studios' will roll out a spinoff comic book miniseries written by novelist and *Hellboy* cowriter Christopher Golden, with artwork by Damian Couceiro (who illustrated BOOM!'s online *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* prequel) and covers by Serbian artist R.M. Guéra (known to English-speaking readers for his work on Vertigo's *Scalped* with Jason Aaron).

Golden is a great fan of *Sons of Anarchy*, which he considers much more than just a show about motorcycles. "I saw ads for it and read about it in advance," he says, "and was intrigued by the tone and texture they were going for. Of course, there's a mystique around MCs that is akin to that surrounding pirates and the criminal gangs of the Old West, like Butch Cassidy's Hole in the Wall gang. But that's just enough to get you to tune in, not to get you to stay."

So, what did make him stay? "Drama, man," Golden explains. "Yes, there's the whole Shakespearean element of the dynamic between Jax, Clay, and Gemma from the outset, but for me it's more than that. The appeal of these characters is that in almost every case, they can justify and rationalize their actions. They believe that the ends justify the means, that they are really the heroes of their own stories."

Sometimes, he says, that means acting heroically and following an admirable code of honor, but "it's the seed of doubt

and darkness in them that's fascinating." The characters, he adds, make decisions that "take parts of the light away from inside them, and it just gets darker and darker until they can rationalize almost anything. Maybe most of our lives aren't as extreme, but we're all rationalizing and negotiating with ourselves and drawing lines in the sand that we promise ourselves we'll never cross, until we're faced with something unexpected—and then, whoa, the temptation to cross is huge."

In that regard, Golden likens *Sons of Anarchy* to *The Shield, Rescue Me,* and *Breaking Bad*. He says he found it difficult to watch the show's most recent season, however, due to Jax's bloody and decidedly non-heroic actions. "I really did see Jax as an antihero, someone whose rationalizations might actually be true, who might find a way out," he says. "But now I see him like Michael Corleone in *The Godfather*. He did something in season five that I can never forgive him for. Even if he gets out of it now, in the end, that darkness will always be inside him."

Although his spinoff comic, *The Whistle Blower*, will tie into the aired episodes, Golden is realistic about his place in the franchise. "Let's be clear on this—the comics are not in any official continuity," he asserts. "As always with this kind of thing, the people who make and air this show are not going to be considering what we do as part of the canon. That said, anytime I take a job like this, for my own sake, I try to tie it into continuity as closely as I can, to find a place in the actual continuity of the show that I can point to and say, 'It fits in there.'"

Though limited in what he can reveal, Golden offers a hint about what readers can expect from *The Whistle*

Blower. "The cat is sort of out of the bag now," he admits, specifically with regard to Kendra, a new character the comic will introduce. "I was trying to keep it as quiet as possible, but the setup is this: Kendra is from L.A. She witnesses something she can't pretend she didn't see and her employer wants her dead, so she runs north to Charming to find Tig and the rest of SAMCRO," the *Sons of Anarchy* Motorcycle Club.

Kendra's uncle was Herman Kozik, a member of SAMCRO's Tacoma chapter, who died during the season-four episode "Call of Duty," upon stepping on a landmine. "Though he wasn't on very long, I loved Kozik and his relationship with Tig," Golden says. "I'm a fan of Kenny Johnson, the actor who played Kozik, and who co-starred for years on *The Shield* and then on *Saving Grace*."

BOOM!'s six-issue series will take place over a few days early during season five, though Golden promises that those unfamiliar with the show "absolutely, positively, do not need to have ever seen an episode of the series to be able to follow the comic." Beyond his initial arc, he adds, sales will determine whether or not BOOM! continues the series. "Schedule permitting, of course, I'd love to do more." As for possible storylines, he muses, "There are some threads from Belfast that I'd like to explore."

In addition to Hunnam, the show also stars Ron Perlman, Katey Sagal, Jimmy Smits, Kim Coates, Mark Boone Jr., Tommy Flanagan, and others. Having such recognizable actors in the cast, Golden says, poses a challenge in capturing each character's voice. "This is the reason I try only to do media tie-in projects based on something I already love," he states. "When you love it, when you're a fan and you pay attention and you're really passionate about the

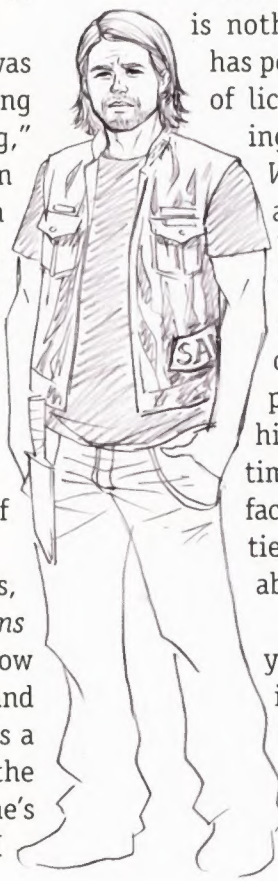
characters, it's not difficult."

Despite his fascination with *Sons of Anarchy*, Golden is not a motorcycle enthusiast, though he cites two elements of his childhood that come into play—one regarding motorcycles, the other gang membership. "My uncle was an orthopedic surgeon," he says, "and I have vivid memories of the multiple times he sat me and my brother down and told us all the horror stories about the people he'd operated on after motorcycle accidents, that they were always the worst, and that we should stay the hell off of motorcycles. I've had a lot of friends who ride, but I freely admit that I never have. Some *SoA* fans will give me shit about that, I'm sure, but it is what it is."

As for the gang aspect? "When I was very young, a friend of my sister was dating a guy who was pledging a local biker gang," Golden recalls. "He was murdered—shot in the head. This was in November 1979, in Ashland, Massachusetts. You dig around enough, you'll find the report. Two days later, his girlfriend—my sister's friend—was found stabbed to death. The cops figured they killed her because she knew who had killed her boyfriend. In my mind—I was twelve at the time—that was all wrapped up with the culture of motorcycles."

Such personal tragedies, Golden says, have not prevented him from enjoying *Sons of Anarchy*. "As I said, my love for this show is all about the drama and the characters and the darkness in them. This story revolves a lot around Tig, who is, in some ways, the darkest of them all. But even though he's doing something heroic in this story, I know he's not a hero. He's not a good man, but he is human." That, he says, makes the characters interesting. "They're not the demons of my childhood—they're human beings making conscious decisions to do inhuman things."

Given its concept, some have deemed *Sons of Anarchy* a surprising choice of television series to spin off into comics. Golden does not agree with such sentiments, however. "It's an insult to the medium to assume you can only tell one kind of story," he counters. "Honestly, one of the biggest hits out there right now is *My Little Pony*. Why is there even a conversation about this? I've heard a number of people saying how unlikely *Sons of Anarchy* is as a comics property, but it's a crime story. Crime comics go back to the very beginning of the medium. Look through any issue of *Previews* and you'll find great crime comics."



Writing for an existing franchise is nothing new to Golden, who has penned a staggering number of licensed tie-in books, ranging from *Hellboy, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, King Kong,* and *Battlestar Galactica* to both the DC and Marvel universes. These days, he spends less time on licensed work than in the past, though he does keep his hand in the game from time to time. At present, in fact, he is working on two new tie-ins, though he is not yet able to provide details.

"I went a couple of years without doing any tie-in work, but these days I tend to do maybe one tie-in novel a year," Golden says. "There's always going to be this fourteen-year-old boy

inside me who gets so excited about certain things that the adult part of me would feel as if it were a betrayal to that long-ago kid if I turned it down. If it's something I love, and I've got the time, and the money's there, I just can't say no." The novelization of Peter Jackson's *King Kong*, he says, fell squarely into that category. "King Kong? Are you kidding me? The original is one of my favorite films of all time; there was no way I was going to turn that one down."

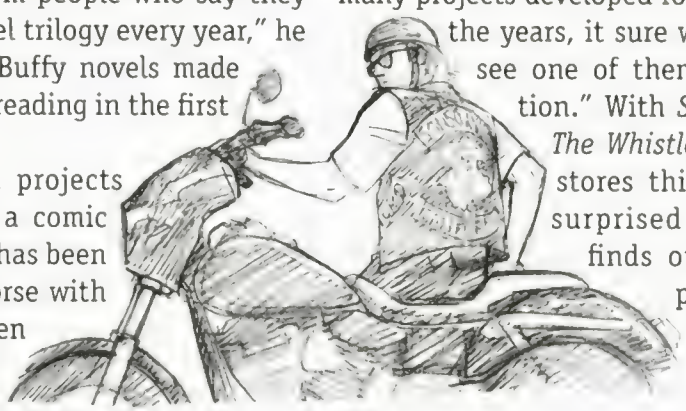
In addition, to his franchise work, Golden has also written a long list of original novels and short story collections. These include *Ghosts of Albion*, created with Buffy actor Amber Benson; *The Menagerie*, co-written by Thomas E. Sniegoski; the *Body of Evidence* series; *The Veil* trilogy; and dozens of other titles. "Every year that passes, I'm less inclined to do tie-ins," he admits. "Every year, the bar is raised a little higher. After the two I'm currently committed to, that may be it. We'll see. Certainly, my original work is more rewarding, both financially and creatively."

Indeed, Golden has received glowing blurbs from authors Stephen King, Michael Koryta, and Dan Chaon for his novel *Snowblind*, set for release in January 2014. The supernatural thriller involves a Massachusetts town haunted by the death and loss suffered during a storm twelve years prior, and reveals what happens when another blizzard brings back those lost—as well as the things that took them. "But I also get e-mails from people who say they read my X-Men novel trilogy every year," he says, "or that my Buffy novels made them interested in reading in the first place."

Other current projects include *Baltimore*, a comic book series Golden has been writing for Dark Horse with Mike Mignola and Ben Stenbeck, with the next story arc, *The Infernal Train*, set to begin the same month as *Sons of Anarchy*. He is also writing *Cemetery Girl*, a trilogy of graphic novels with Charlaine Harris—the author of *The Southern Vampire Mysteries*, adapted for television by HBO as *True Blood*—that tell the story of a girl left for dead in a graveyard, who awakens with no memory but with a strange connection to the deceased. And *Dark Duets* is an anthology that he edited for Harper Voyager, each story a collaboration between two (in one case, three) authors who have never written together before.

Golden also has three film projects presently in development. "Last I knew on *Talent*," the writer reports, "Zack Whedon was working on a new draft of the script, but I'm not quite sure where it stands. Universal is developing that with Marc Platt Productions." *Joe Golem and the Drowning City*, meanwhile, is being developed by Constantin Film, to be written and directed by Alex Proyas, whose other stylish work includes *The Crow, Dark City, I, Robot,* and *Knowing*. "We're waiting for the latest version of that script as well," he says.

Finally, Golden's upcoming young-adult book project, *Tin Men*, has been optioned by Warner Bros. for Peter Chernin to produce, though a screenwriter has yet to be chosen. "The ebb and flow of these projects is always fascinating," he states. "One minute they seem dead in the water, and the next they come roaring back to life. I've had so many projects developed for film or TV over the years, it sure would be nice to see one of them come to fruition." With *Sons of Anarchy: The Whistle Blower* hitting stores this fall, don't be surprised if the author finds other TV-related projects on his plate down the line.



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THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN VERSUS HALL H

by Brendon Connelly

When Sony kicked off their San Diego Comic-Con panel for the first *Amazing Spider-Man* film in 2011, they went for one heck of an opening gambit. Some fella in a Spider-Man costume jumped up almost immediately and got stuck right in with persistent interruptions for the host, taking to the audience Q&A mic way early, and pushing hard for some attention.

Just to keep this apparent wingnut orderly, it seemed, the panel host ceded and the cosplay hero was allowed to regale the crowd with his heartfelt commentary on a life spent in love with the character of Spider-Man.

The surprise was, that hiding out under the mask was none other than Andrew Garfield, the young English actor that - at this point - nobody had seen or heard of in the role, and a genuine Spider-Man fan since he was a toddler. At the end of his totally sincere paen to Peter Parker, Garfield pulled off his disguise and the room - who had admittedly gotten one step ahead by now, went animal wild.

Sony tried to tap back into this magic for this year's presentation of their *Amazing Spider-Man* sequel. After leading us into "live footage" of Spider-Man in downtown San Diego, making his way athletically, if not superheroically through the crowds, the lights came up to reveal... Spider-Man was not quite on stage yet. The timing wasn't perfect. But he walked out one skipped beat later to some applause. And he stayed there a good while, taking questions and chatting, remaining in character, slinging Spider-zingers, even dropping jokes about how attractive he finds Emma Stone, Gwen Stacy's alter ego and Garfield's real life girlfriend.

But the crowd reaction was a little muted, definitely when compared to the frenzy that greeted 2011's stunt.

Maybe it's because the new *Amazing Spider-Man* series, with its fresh cast and director, was a real unknown quantity back

in '11, surfing into San Diego on a huge wave of optimism. Maybe it's because the first stunt was better and more exciting than the second one, and certainly more of a surprise. In any case, it was obvious that this panel could have been going better for Sony. For whatever reason, it seemed like the sensation-spoiled Hall H wanted something more than Andrew Garfield giving them a live Spidey show.

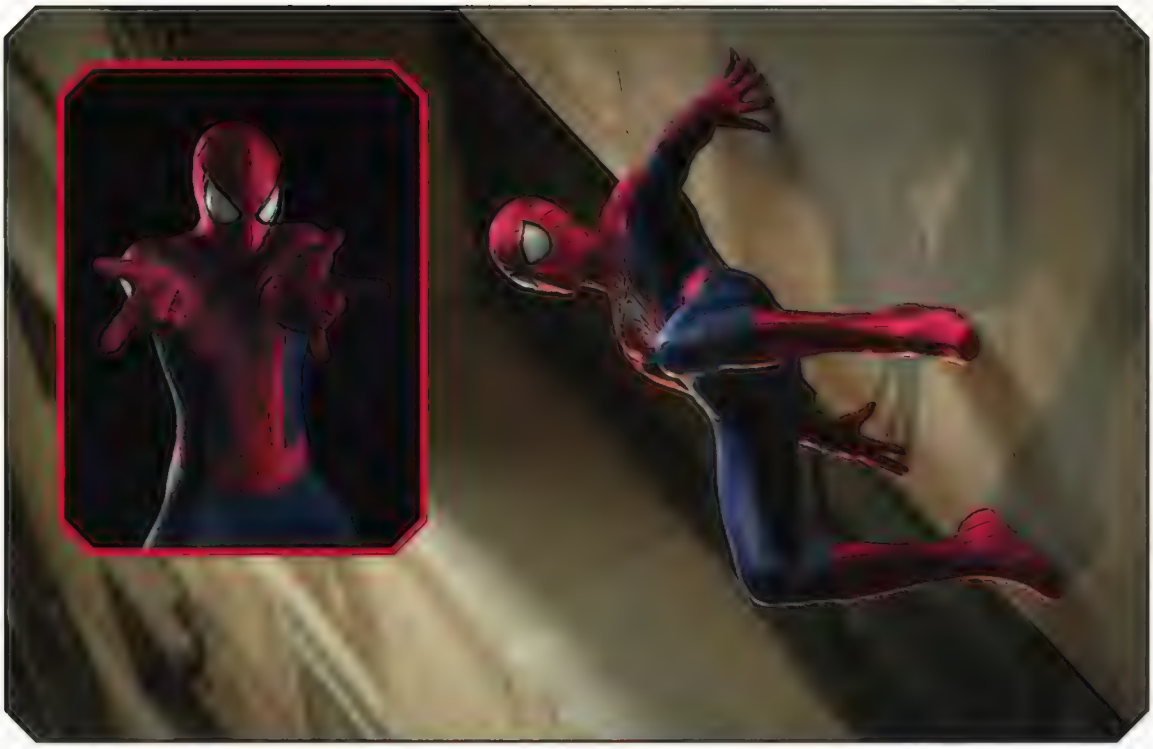
But shortly enough it was time to premiere some footage. Unusually, Sony had decided to promote the panel online in the previous days with a short clip of Electro making threats, so this wasn't the world's first look at the film in motion, but it was certainly the most substantial.

The footage opened - as will the film, I understand - with Spider-Man chasing The Rhino. Not in his Rhino guise, mind, but as Aleksei Mikhailovich Sytsevich, the hissing, tattooed Russian gangster, played here by Paul Giamatti. He was stealing something from Oscorp, and Spider-Man was coming to retrieve it.

This was light stuff, exciting without any real sense of danger. Spidey quipped openly during their brightly-lit face-off, and used his webs to pull down Sytsevich's pants. This was all about getting things going in a zippy way.

But we were then introduced to Max Dillon, and this is where things started to get more dramatic. We learn that Dillon, an electrician working at Oscorp, is rather invested in Spider-Man. There was a sad mix-up where they happen to meet and Spidey knows Dillon's name because he reads it from his Oscorp badge, but Dillon mistakenly believes that Spider-Man somehow knows who he is. In the full feature this will be set-up for their doomed relationship with Dillon trying to make Electro into a sidekick for Spider-Man before being brushed off. Yes, that makes me think of Syndrome and Mr. Incredible too.

The origin of Electro's powers was revealed too, and once again it hangs on Oscorp's genetically modified animal labs. After getting a shock while working on some

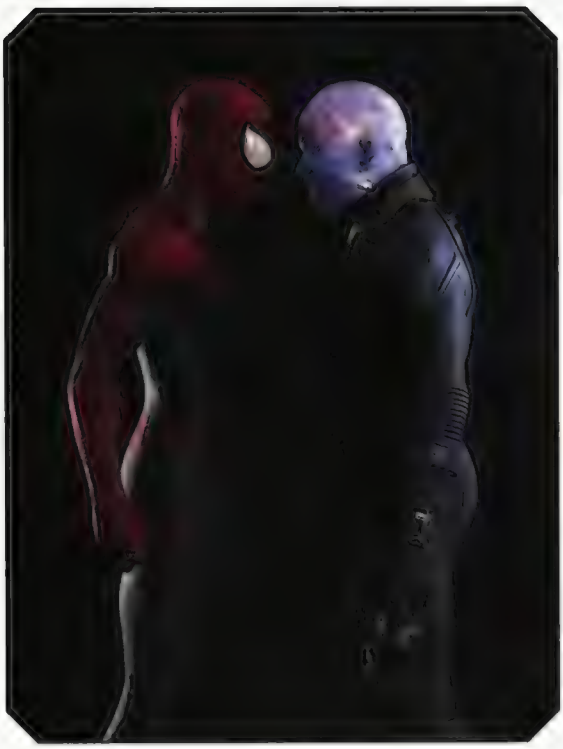


wiring, Dillon fell a few stories, banging his way down inside one of the company's industrial experimentation spaces and landing in a tank of electric eels.

Now, I liked the clips and I'm thinking that the signs are good. *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* is in a great position to take up what worked from the first film - principally that brilliant cast - and also move on from what didn't. Real buzz from closer to the production tells us that, yes, this time, they're working it out well. This comes from the same voices that told us last time when things started to get a bit tangled, and it's nice to hear them feeling good this time around.

But sadly, the evidence wasn't really on display at Comic-Con. The Hall H footage may not convince many folk at all that we're actually in for anything other than more of the same. It's really the stuff that's leaked out around the edges that gives me the most confidence. It's the business Sony hasn't officially told us, pieces that we've come across by other means.

The last film was re-edited fairly



drastically as the release date approached. I understand why Sony wouldn't make a fuss about the chops and changes they put the first picture through, but there's definitely a way in which that re-editing process does bode well for the sequels: many of the edits were made for the good of multi-movie story line. It took the filmmakers a while to work out the long game, but they've got a proper road map now.

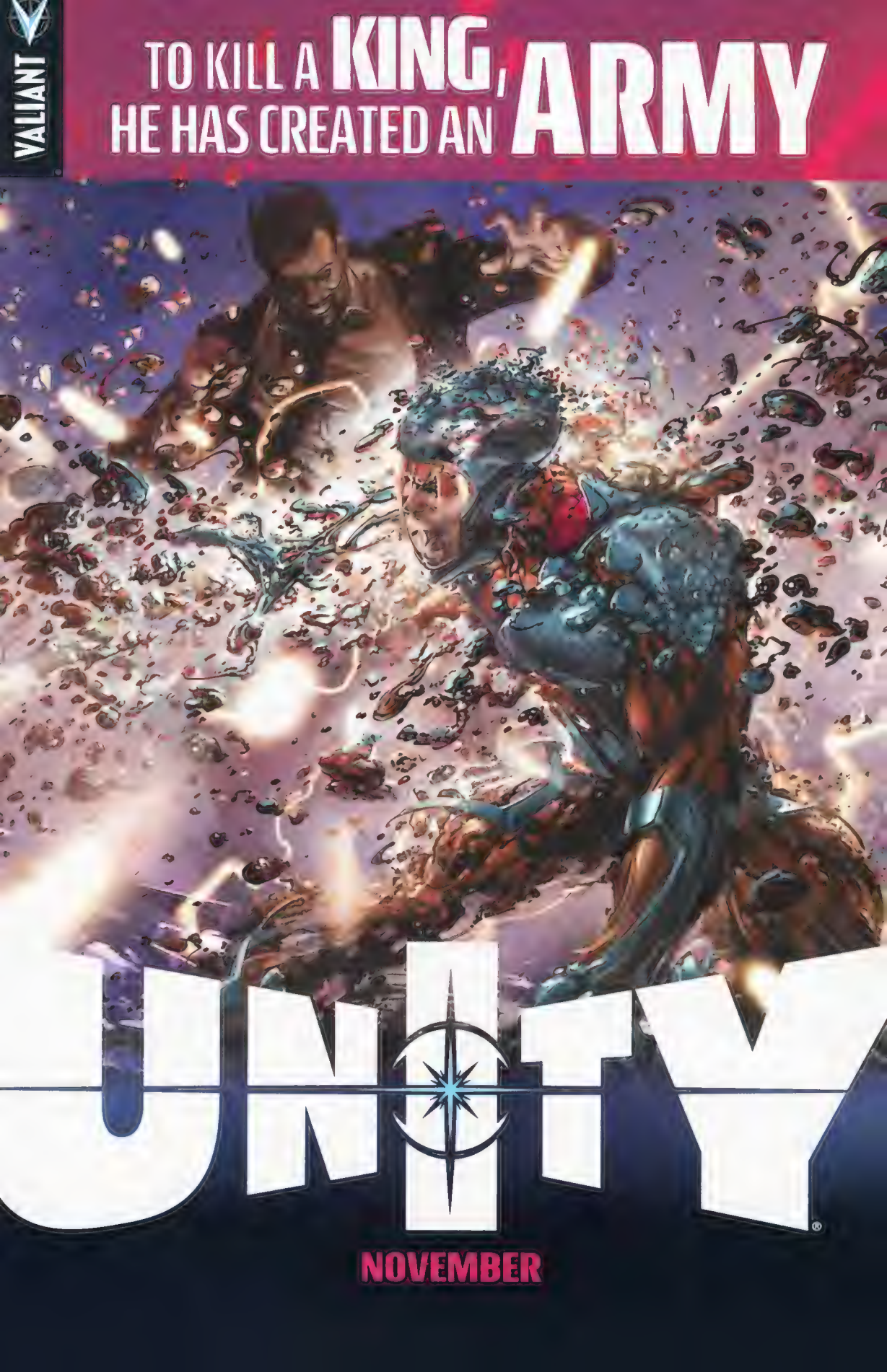
It seems like the second film has already gone through a revamp of its own, with Mary Jane Watson's small role snipped out. The idea is that she'll now be introduced in the third movie. This too is a symptom of the filmmakers starting to think further ahead.

Marvel Studios are able to draw on any number of comic books to create an expansive, living and breathing universe for their movies, but Sony is cornered with access to just Spider-Man lore. It's not going to stop them trying to build "a universe," however. And so, *The Amazing Spider-Man* series will move forward, introducing new characters in good number, with plans to build to a big finale that taps into all of the previous chapters. Sony can't have their own Avengers, but Spider-Man does set them up for the distinctive possibility of The Sinister Six, a team up of supervillains, not superheroes.

Sadly, none of this was teased even obscurely on stage in Hall H. It's a real lost opportunity, I fear, because this is the stuff that the hardcore fans would froth for. I was in a room of 6,500 folk, most of whom spent the majority of the night sleeping on the pavement just for a taste of what's coming down the pike. This was the perfect audience to let in on the bigger picture, and the perfect opportunity to do so.

I think this might have been Spider-Man's off year at San Diego, between his amazing debut and the refreshed, renewed enthusiasm that will follow when Sony, director Marc Webb, and the cast can admit to the scale of what they're building up to.

We'll get our first look at that expanding canvas when *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* is released next May.


VALIANT
TO KILL A KING, HE HAS CREATED AN ARMY
UNITY
NOVEMBER

THE GIRLS ARE BACK IN TOWN:

IDW Brings Back *The Powerpuff Girls*

by Dan Wickline

In a recent licensing deal with Cartoon Network, IDW Publishing acquired the rights to a bounty of properties including *Ben10, Dexter's Laboratory, Samurai Jack, Johnny Bravo, Generator Rex*, and of course *The Powerpuff Girls*. The original cartoon series ran from November 1998 to March of 2005 and featured Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, the super-powered experiments of Professor Utonium that went awry when he spilled Chemical X into his attempt to create the perfect girls. IDW's new comic series will be in the hands of writer/artist Troy Little. I got a chance to sit down with the Canadian cartoonist and talk about the new project.

YOU HAVE A HISTORY OF WORKING WITH IDW, BUT THIS APPEARS TO BE YOUR FIRST LICENSED PROPERTY WORK. HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT AND HOW DOES YOUR APPROACH DIFFER FROM DOING YOUR CREATOR-OWNED WORK?

TROY I've developed a good working relationship with IDW over time. I've already had three of my own books published with them so it made sense that they were the people to approach with my next project. I was actually pitching them a monthly *Angora Napkin* comic series when they instead proposed that I work on *The Powerpuff Girls*. Naturally, I jumped on it! I mean, I'd love to be doing an *Angora Napkin* series but I've always loved *The Powerpuff Girls*. It's a project that's totally up my alley. Then they took a cool job and made it irresistible by

offering me the option to write and colour the book as well!

Working with an editor and on a licensed project is a first for me in comics but not unlike working in the animation industry. Everything has to go through an approval stage, so I'm used to that having been working in animation for the past 16 years. The main difference for me is basically having to do a bit more leg work writing full, formatted scripts, taking notes on the art at all stages, and not straying too far from the established look of things. You can take a lot more liberties on your own projects with no one to please but yourself but it's also a fun challenge trying to capture the essence and energy of the graphic style of the show and interpret it into comics.

So far it's been a perfect match and an absolute pleasure to work on. I love being able to contribute something of my own to *The Powerpuff Girls* and so far everything has been very well received at Cartoon Network and my editor Sarah Gaydos at IDW is the best! Some days I can't believe my luck!

WHAT WAS YOUR FAMILIARITY WITH *THE POWERPUFF GIRLS* PRIOR TO GETTING THE ASSIGNMENT? HOW MUCH RESEARCH DID YOU NEED TO DO TO GET READY TO START THE SERIES?

I've always been a fan of *The Powerpuff Girls* since it first came on TV. Nick Cross and I created *Angora Napkin* in 1997 and *The Powerpuff Girls* came out around 1998. We found that there were a lot of similarities between what Craig McCracken created and stuff we wanted to do, so naturally we became fans of the show. I even went to see the movie when it was out in theaters!

Once I talked to IDW about my ideas I went and snagged a bunch of the old DC comics off eBay for quick reference and to see what had been done before. The series then came up on Netflix so I had a chance to refresh my memory and also introduce my kids to the show. My main frame of reference has been the movie because I'm really enamored with just how well they nailed the look and the colour treatment on that.

When approaching this project, did you plan to stay close to the cartoon series or did you have your own take on the series and how you want it to expand? What elements of the series did you feel were important to keep?

It's been a while since the show's been on TV and I'd imagine most of the fans are a little older now, so for me I wanted to try and walk a fine line between making an exciting comic for kids and telling a story complex enough to engage the older fans.

The TV shows were generally self-contained shorts, as were the old DC comics. I felt that taking the stories and allowing them more room to breath would be a better approach in grabbing the older audience so I approached the six issue arc as if it were a movie with sub plots and all that grown up stuff. But at its core it's a superhero action comic, so there's going to be lots of monsters and villains to fight as well or it just wouldn't be *The Powerpuff Girls*!

What can fans of the cartoon series that have been missing the girls expect to see when they get that first issue?

The first issue has the girls back in fighting form taking on Mojo Jojo, a swamp monster, and generally saving the day before bedtime! But this time around Mojo's had enough of being beaten by the power tot trio and elects to be given "Antidote X" and return to his simian state of ignorant bliss. But that's merely the tip of the iceberg! I've packed lots of classic villains into the story arc and some fun twists along the way!

Since you are looking an audience that includes younger readers, are you doing more stand-alone stories or is there going to be an overall story arc?

There's an overall story arc for the first 6 issues but I can imagine mixing that up if the series is successful. I think a good balance of short stories and major arcs would strike a good balance. My kids (twins girls) are almost 7 and really enjoy *My Little Pony* and *Sonic the Hedgehog* comics. We look forward every month to visiting the local comic shops to pick up the new chapters of the stories, so I don't feel that long format stories are a negative in kid's comics.

As the writer and artist on the series, what is your process for creating the book? Are you doing full scripts then drawing it or just loose plots and then dialogue after its drawn?

I've plotted out the entire story by issue and I'm writing full scripts. I'm lucky that I can mess around with things a bit to make the story flow smoothly. That's a major perk

when doing both the writing and art. Add a line here, drop something that isn't working, expand or omit panels, etc. Cartoon Network has been very receptive to all stages of the project without many changes so far, so I must be doing something right!

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO FANS OF THE TELEVISION SERIES WHO DON'T NORMALLY BUY COMICS TO GET THEM TO GIVE ISSUE #1 A SHOT?

Remember how cool *The Powerpuff Girls* were when you were kids? They're still that awesome! If you're like me; a little older and with kids of your own, a little nostalgic for those fun characters and villains then it's a perfect time to introduce your kids to one of the coolest superhero teams ever!

I have a lot of fun writing and drawing these characters, I hope my love of *The Powerpuff Girls* seeps into the page and connects with others like myself and the next generation as well. I hope to do justice to the spirit of the show and also bring something fresh to it as well.

The creative reins of the series are in Troy's hand, but how did they get there? I asked Chris Ryall, IDW's Chief Creative Officer/Editor-in-Chief how *The Powerpuff Girls* ended up with the San Diego, CA based publisher.

IDW BUILT ITS NAME ON HORROR FIRST AND THEN LICENSED PROPERTIES. THOUGH YOU'VE DONE SOME FAMILY-FRIENDLY BOOKS AND CLASSIC CARTOONS OVER THE YEARS, THE CARTOON NETWORK DEAL SEEMS TO BE A BIG PUSH INTO THE ALL-AGES MARKET. DID THE DECISION TO EXPAND THE COMPANY IN THAT DIRECTION COME FIRST AND THEN YOU LOOKED FOR A DEAL OR DID THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK WITH CARTOON NETWORK GET THE BALL ROLLING?

CHRIS It feels like a natural move after we've grown more and more into publishing all-ages comics. Some of our *Transformers* and *TMNT* titles aim at a younger audience. And certainly the success of *My Little Pony* last year showed us even more that there's a wide audience out there for fun, all-ages comics. The Cartoon Net stuff feels like another great way to reach not only younger readers with titles like *Powerpuff Girls*, but also people who watched the show the first time around. And titles like *Samurai Jack* very squarely hit the normal comic-book audience.

YOU'VE TAPPED INTO QUITE A TREASURE TROVE OF PROPERTIES WITH THIS DEAL. HOW WAS *THE POWERPUFF GIRLS* CHOSEN TO BE THE FIRST OUT THE GATE? WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE OVERALL PLAN FOR GETTING THESE TITLES OUT TO THE PUBLIC?

Powerpuff Girls is coming back on TV this fall, so it made sense to have the comic out at the same time; but certainly titles like *Samurai Jack* and *Ben 10*, which launch closely behind *PPG*, would've made just as much sense to lead with. Beyond those three, we've had some conversations about what will come next but we're not quite ready to get into those plans just yet.

What is IDW's approach to the content of these series ? Are you looking to continue the feel of the cartoons as comics or are you going to ask the creators to bring in their own take on the properties?

Titles like *PPG* hold more appeal to fans of the show if the comic doesn't diverge too far from what people expect to see, but I think there's more room with titles like *Samurai Jack* to do some different things. That'll first be evidenced in some of the covers we're doing--there are lots of good comic artists with varying styles who are huge fans of Genndy's work and want to do *Jack* covers. That said, Andy Suriano, the artist on the title, was a designer on the show so fans will very much recognize the character and world they liked. *Ben 10* will also carry through the look of the show at the start. I think it's good to launch with familiar-looking titles and then build toward even more varied styles as we move forward.

Which of these series are you the most personally excited to have under the IDW logo?

Ahh, man, you know I never play favorites with my children! But I watched a lot of *PPG* with my daughter when she was very young and read her some of the old comics, so now that she's 7 and is fully into comics, I'm looking forward to having good new *PPG* comics for her. But I also can't wait to see what Jim Zub and Andy do with *Samurai Jack*, and I think Jason Henderson and Gordon Purcell have really fun things in the works for *Ben 10*, too. Which is a longer way of me saying "all of 'em, Dan, all of 'em."

Along with the new series, Cartoon Network announced in January that there will be a new CGI special this year directed by Dave Smith, a veteran of the cartoon series. The special will also feature a new song I Wish I Was A Powerpuff Girl and a new character Fibonacci Sequins sung/voiced by the Beatles Ringo Starr. With the new comic series and the new special, the future for fans of *the Powerpuff Girls* appears to be very bright.

THE PULL LIST
by James Kuhoric

Fall is upon us and with it comes all things creepy and crawly for Halloween. This season is one of my favorites, having been raised on horror movies and comics. Usually right around October first I start picking classic horror flicks to watch leading up to the big night. There is something about turning off the lights and watching something terrifying around this time of year. And I love every minute of it.

With that in mind, this edition of the Pull List is focused around great horror comics and Halloween classics coming out this fall. These are comics that can put you in the spirit of the season and still deliver dose of terror while reading. There are many great comics this month...but here are my September and October favorites.

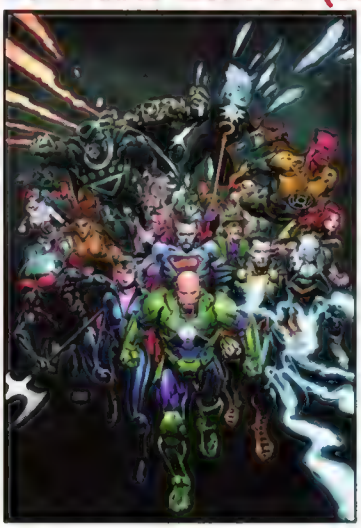
Sandman: Overture #1

What can you say about the return of Neil Gaiman to the series that defined Vertigo for so many years? His vision influenced generations of readers and creators with a tale that ranks in the top five of all-time greatest comics. *Sandman: Overture* promises to be a wonderful addition to the mythos with JH Williams III delivering beautiful and vibrant illustrations to Gaiman's scripts. This series seems to have everything: an unmatched creative team, the promise of illumination on the origin of a fan favorite character, and the highly anticipated new chapter of evolution in a comic book that changed the face of the hobby 25 years ago. Gaiman's legions of fans have a Halloween treat like no other when *Sandman: Overture* arrives in stores on October 30th.

Love It: At last, one of the true masters of the medium is back doing what we love and delivering an unequalled creative vision.

Hate It: Is the magic still there? I believe it is.

Honorable Mention (superheroes):



Forever Evil #1 – A month of villains taking over the DC Universe, how delightfully dreadful for the heroes. It's been done before but never on this scale and it is rare enough that it still satisfies when it arrives. And with DC's colorful cast of rogues, it is sure to be criminally good.

Afterlife With Archie #1

Zombie Jughead? He's right there on the cover – still wearing the crown. You have to hand it to Archie Comics. They have time and time again come up with some pretty clever ways to get new readers

interested in the Archie-verse. And *Afterlife With Archie* boasts some great creative talent between Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa and Francesco Francavilla. I understand that they are playing this series straight – it's the real zombie apocalypse in Riverdale not a dream or one-off. Who wouldn't want to see Archie have to face his longtime pals as the shambling dead? Could this be the "Marvel Zombies" approach with Archie characters?

Love It: What will they think of next for Archie? I love the versatility and the way they embrace new readers into the Riverdale fold.

Hate It: I have a feeling we'll have quite a bit more camp than actual horror, but I'm giving it a try.

Honorable Mention (kids): *Adventure Time Spooktacular #1* – Every year there is a comic that embraces the season and provides entertainment geared to kids that transcends its target audience and also captivates adults. *Adventure Time's Spooktacular* looks to be that book this year. Following in the footsteps of Bongo's traditional *Simpsons: Treehouse of Horror* (also a great pick for the season) this comic is ready to deliver a holiday helping of Finn and Jake!

The Black Beetle: Necrologue #1

Just admit one thing - Francesco Francavilla is awesome. See, it's simple. *The Black Beetle* packs classic noir flare into a story that combines the elements of pulp, mystery, and retro horror to deliver one of the best overall comics being published. This comic book appeals to the pulp fan

with modern sensibilities and the design sense is one part retro, one part art deco, and all together amazing. There's nothing dry or old fashioned in the delivery, it is everything you could ask for from a classic being told for today's more sophisticated readers. Any fan of Doc Savage, The Spirit, or The Shadow should pick this up and add another modern masterpiece to the ranks of the classics.

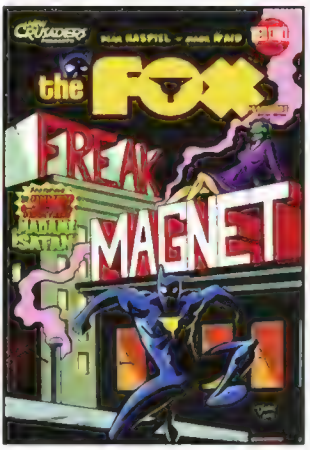
Love It: Francesco Francavilla is in the groove. He hit the ground running with the first Black Beetle series and this looks like he has only picked up steam.

Hate It: There are a lot of pulp heroes out there – to continue to be unique is the real challenge.

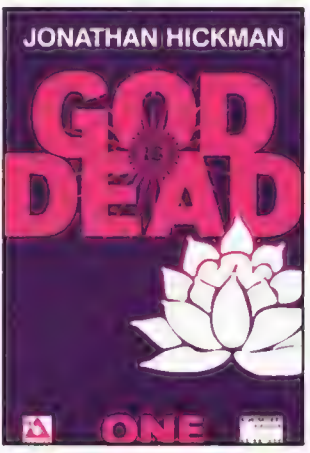
Honorable Mention (Pulp Noir): *The Shadow Now #1* – Speaking of the Shadow…Dynamite's new limited series takes the pulp hero of yesteryear and reinvents him in the modern era. How would Lamont Cranston fight crime in the 21st century? Chances are with both barrels blazing. An advance look at the art for this series has me very intrigued – with Tim Bradshaw on the covers and Colton Worley's photo realistic interior art, this looks to be "Ultimate Shadow" for current comics fans.

Those are the books I'm adding to my pull list this Halloween. Here are a few others I'll be watching out for as well:

Eternal Warrior #1 – I am loving the Valiant line like never before. Each new series has been re-energized and reinvented. *The Eternal Warrior* looks to be another strong addition to this constantly building universe.



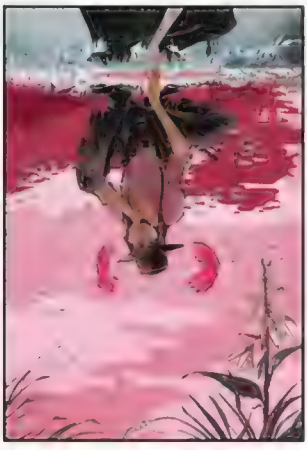
The Fox #1 – Two Archies on my pull list in the same feature? Yep – Dean Haspel and Mark Waid working on an addition to the world of the *New Crusaders* is definitely worth checking out. And there is something fun about the covers that reminds me in a strange way of *The Tick*. I'm not sure if I should yell "spoon" before reading or not…



God is Dead #1 – Jonathan Hickman is red hot right now with books like *East of West*. Given the reigns to do whatever un-censored thing he wants at Avatar Press could create something really special. And with that title it is sure to generate some controversy.

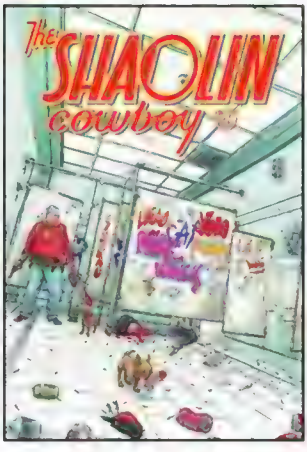
Marvel Knights Spider-Man #1 – Matt Kindt and Marco Ruby pit Spider-Man against ninety-nine villains? With all the waves in

the Spider-Universe of late, I'm really looking forward to something this seemingly old school. Bring on the bad guys!

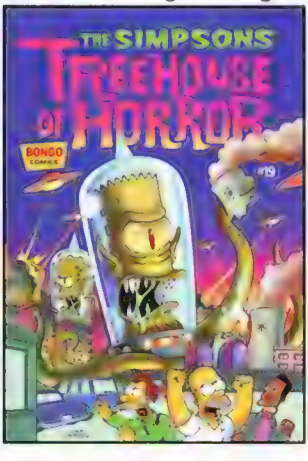


Pretty Deadly #1 – Is it just me or does this series look like the next BIG thing from Image Comics? Kelly Sue Deconnick and Emma Rios are creating a world that is a mix of *Sandman* and *Preacher*? Sign me up!

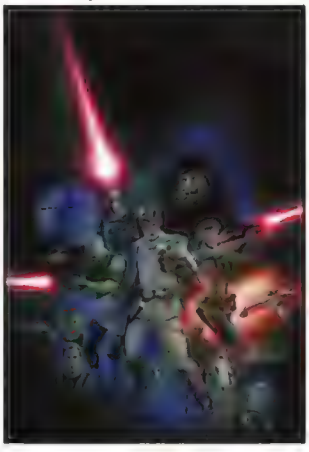
Samurai Jack #1 / Powerpuff Girls #1 – Bravo IDW for bringing Cartoon Network's classics back to comics. For more on *Powerpuff* Girls, be sure to check out our feature in this month's issue. One can never get enough Mojo Jojo.



Shaolin Cowboy #1 – FINALLY!!! At last Geoff Darrow's incredible kung-fu hero is back in comics. This series was one of the best when it was at Burlyman Entertainment years ago. And I expect that it will be even better coming out regularly from Dark Horse.



Simpsons Treehouse of Horror #19 – It's not Halloween without Bongo's annual Simpsons Treehouse of Horror. For almost twenty years they have been serving up an annual dose of clever Simpsons antics just in time for tricks or treats.

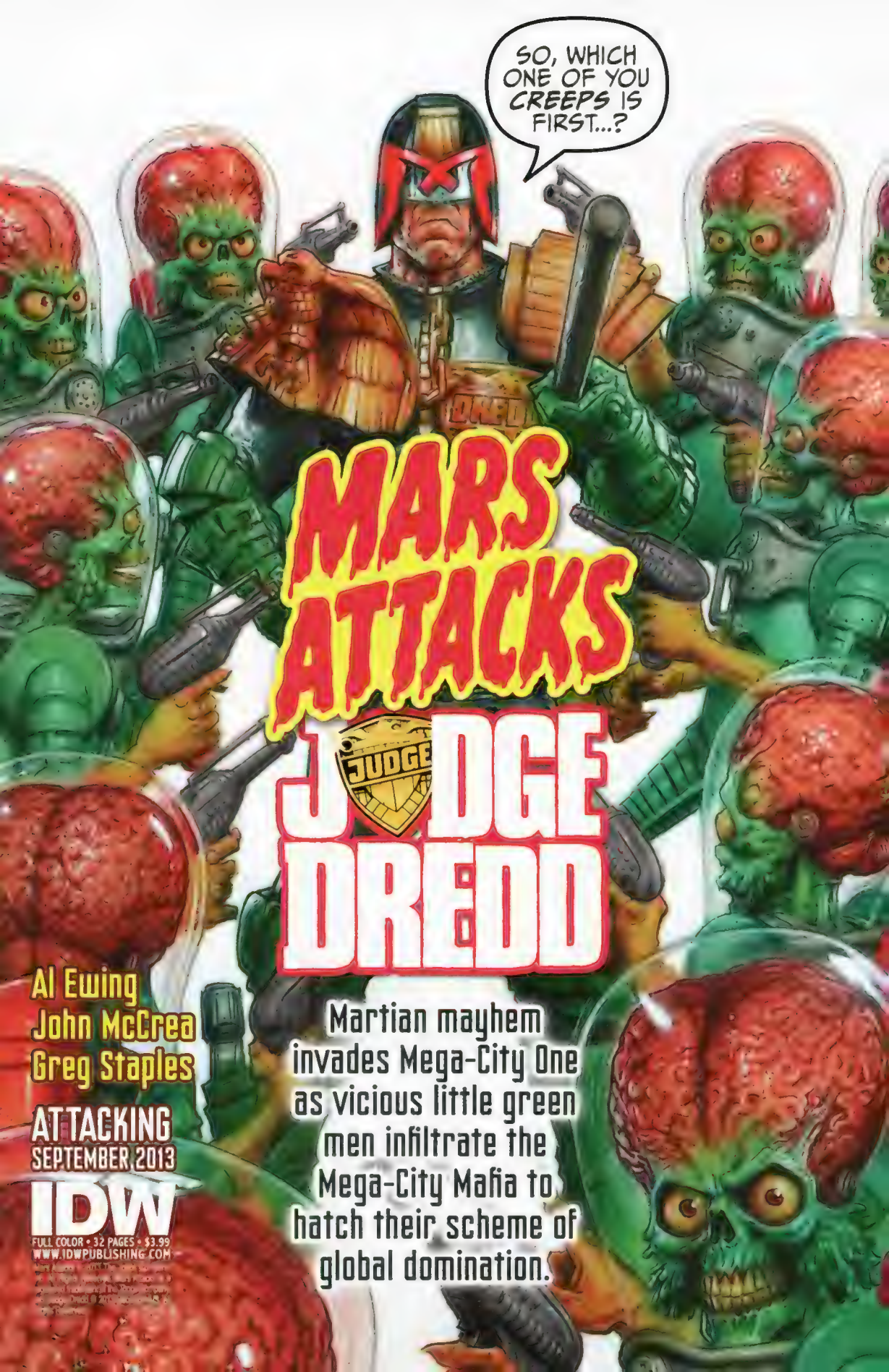


The Star Wars #1 – Hold the phone! This would have been one of my top picks for the fall had we not gone with the Halloween theme. We get to see an adaptation of the original George Lucas "The Star Wars" screenplay as a comic book? The one where the hero is Anakin Starkiller and Han Solo is actually a big green alien? I can't wait to get a look at what might have been a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

Superman / Wonder Woman #1 – How has this not been done before? Two of DC's iconic heroes finally paired together in their own comic book. When do we get *Aquaman / Ambush Bug*?

Three #1 – Kieron Gillen has won me over. His new Image series *Three* tells the truth behind the Spartan 300. Each warrior had a team of three slaves that prepared them for war and saw the truth behind these men of legend. With Gillen at the helm, I expect this to be an eye opening tale that will change the way we look at the Spartan 300.

Trish out of Water #1 – You think you know what Aspen is about? Think again. This new series is as different from their mainstay titles as you can get. And I am very much looking forward to reading this unique tale from Vince Hernandez and Giuseppe Cafaro.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GETTING INTO CHARACTER: A COSPLAYING ROUNDTABLE

by Rich Handley

Every year, conventions attract thousands of science fiction, comic book, fantasy, animation, horror, and gaming fans. One aspect of this phenomenon that has grown in popularity is a performance art known as costume play, or "cosplaying." Costumers wear outfits and accessories befitting a fictional character, concept, creature, or machine. Some incorporate role-playing into the hobby, to not just look the part, but also act and speak like the characters being emulated.

Cosplayers come in all shapes, sizes, ages, and ethnicities, and their outfits demonstrate talent, hard work, and dedication. Despite the media's tendency to focus on sex appeal (or to mock those not fitting the "sexy" image), there is more to the hobby than exhibitionism—it's about passionate fans expressing enjoyment of their favorite franchises. Cosplaying has provided geek culture with a source of pride, fun, and community—both for the costumers and for those admiring their work.

The growing emergence of costuming has helped to usher comics, once stigmatized as a hobby for socially awkward males, into the mainstream. Comic-based blockbuster films have been hugely successful, comic-related series have become a television mainstay, and reading comics has emerged as something the "cool crowd"—and even celebrities—are no longer embarrassed to admit they do. Nicolas Cage, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Patton Oswalt, Wil Wheaton, Kristin Bell, Jerry Seinfeld, Seth Green, Rosario Dawson, Simon Pegg, Patrick Stewart, and even Barack Obama are all self-proclaimed comic fans. And these days, they're not afraid to admit it.

I recently spoke with eight cosplayers who shared their insights into why they enjoy dressing up, how they craft their creations, the mainstreaming of comic books, and the sexism and negativity that some women face regarding their participation in a once male-dominated hobby.

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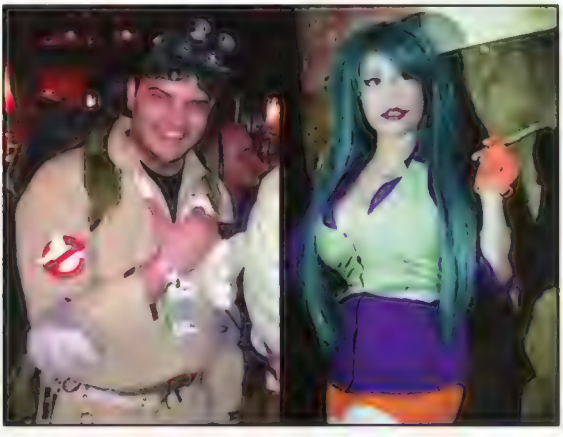

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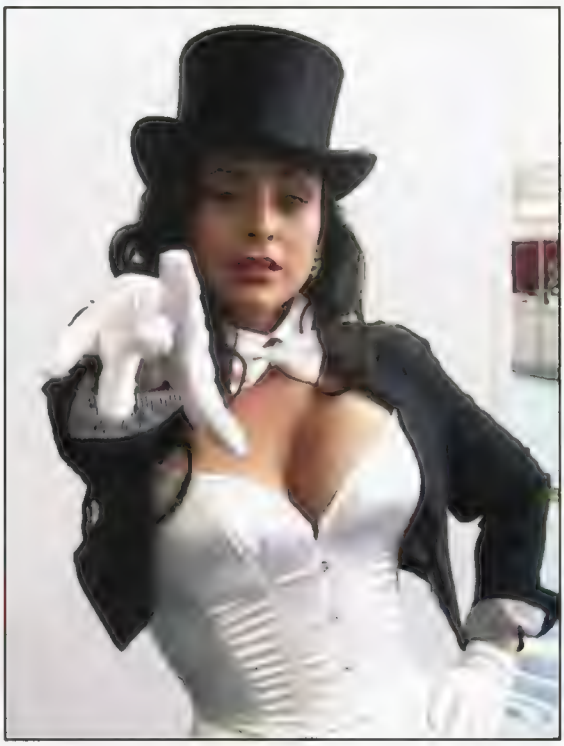
WHAT ABOUT COSPLAYING MOST ATTRACTS YOU?

NOEL Cosplaying is a way to escape being you for a day. The whole process of picking a character, researching and creating the costume, to finally seeing all of your hard work, is amazing. It gives me a rush, when I finally get to put the costume on that I've worked so hard to make. Gaming culture has been a part of my entire life, as I grew up with two older brothers and almost every gaming console you could imagine; as I got older and into things like World of Warcraft, putting the two pastimes together was bound to happen.

PEREZ I've always enjoyed dressing up, but my main passion is storytelling, and a character portrait is a big part of that. When cosplaying, I celebrate a mythos that inspires me and I promote favorite characters I want to see more of. When I started going to San Diego Comic-Con, I was appalled by the lack of Wonder Women. So the next year, I attended as Wonder Woman and the photos of my cosplay appeared in news articles around the world. Then I started to get a lot of requests, and began appearing as Zatanna and Scarlet Witch, too. Now, six years later, I happily see a lot more Amazons and magic women everywhere!



BLANDER It's a serious form of escape into a different world where I can be someone else and have a different life, where I can live out another aspect of my nature and character. Loads of fun, and I love the way people react to how well you cosplay a certain character, or create a certain costume look—as with, say, period clothing.

POPTART My first costuming venture was my first foray into comics—or, I should say, more mainstream ones. I had ventured into comic shops, to pick up *Love and Rockets* and *Sandman*. It wasn't until I was at MarCon, helping a friend with her booth, watching people walking around like extras out of *The Hobbit* cartoon, that this guy came up and started talking to me. I'm from the South; as I started to converse with him, he stopped me and said, "Oh my god, you're perfect for Rogue." I said, "Who?" and he replied, "X-Men?" and I again said, "Who?" The guy was Scott Crawford and we became friends, and he gave me a stack of *X-Men* comics to learn about Rogue. He began making the costume, and I took care of the wig. Thankfully, I had one specially made by the time we did our photo shoot, which landed us the grand prize in the *Wizard Guide to Comics* annual costume contest.

DARLING First, let me say that I don't consider myself a cosplayer. I'm more of a costumer. I was first exposed to cosplay by a nerdy girl I went to high school with. She was into anime and a bunch of shit I never got into. It represented a genre of people who dressed up as characters from anime, movies, cartoons, and manga, who went to conventions, where they would act

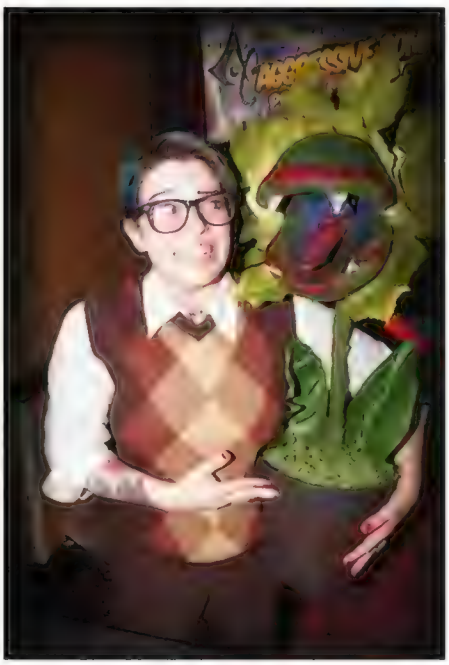
out scenes, talk like the characters, and look exactly like the characters. It was a form of live-action role-play. These kids made their own costumes. They didn't buy them at Party City or Target. It was a hobby, a craft of hours to get the exact details of a character or image down, to become this character. Jump to 2013: If someone puts on a wig and sunglasses, they're "cosplaying." If someone buys a Halloween costume and wears it out, they're "cosplaying." Not that there is anything wrong with any of that at all. I guess the point is that the definition has evolved so that I'm not even sure it means the same as when I was first introduced.

ESPIN I've been cosplaying for as long as I've been part of the Minions of Gozer [Ghostbusters stage show], which was since February 2011. I've always loved being in costume for Halloween. When I found out Minions was happening, I was ecstatic, to say the least, about an opportunity to reenact my favorite movie of all time. Fortunately, I landed the role of Peter Venkman and have loved every second of it. It required a lot of research: watching the movie scene by scene, studying not only what he was wearing, but what props he had on him, and trying to best replicate Bill Murray's hair with my Cuban hair!

GOMEZ Getting to cosplay means that you're getting to show your love for a character, and that's what inspires me to keep doing it. I've been cosplaying for several years now, and it all started back when I first attended Comic Con. I was so intrigued, seeing all the elaborate costumes, that I knew I had to be a part of this world. I love portraying "good girls." I don't do many villains, although it may be fun to.

What goes into making a typical getup?

DARLING I create my own costumes. Although I can't sew very well, I've always found items at thrift stores and randomly at other places to complete a look. I've also hired seamstresses to have custom-made items. Not once have I worn a store-bought/Party City superhero costume and attempted to portray myself as a cosplayer.



ESPIN I try to do my best and create costumes with what I have available, and more importantly, what I can afford. Cosplaying is pretty pricey, especially when you're a Ghostbuster; I can't even imagine how those Stormtroopers do it! I try to create my things out of what I can find, so the pack I wear is made out of Tupperware, wood, LED push lights, spray paint and a lot of love. Granted, I know for a fact that it's not the most accurate thing, but it's the best I can do within my means, and it's the best I could do to give my love and passion for this film justice.

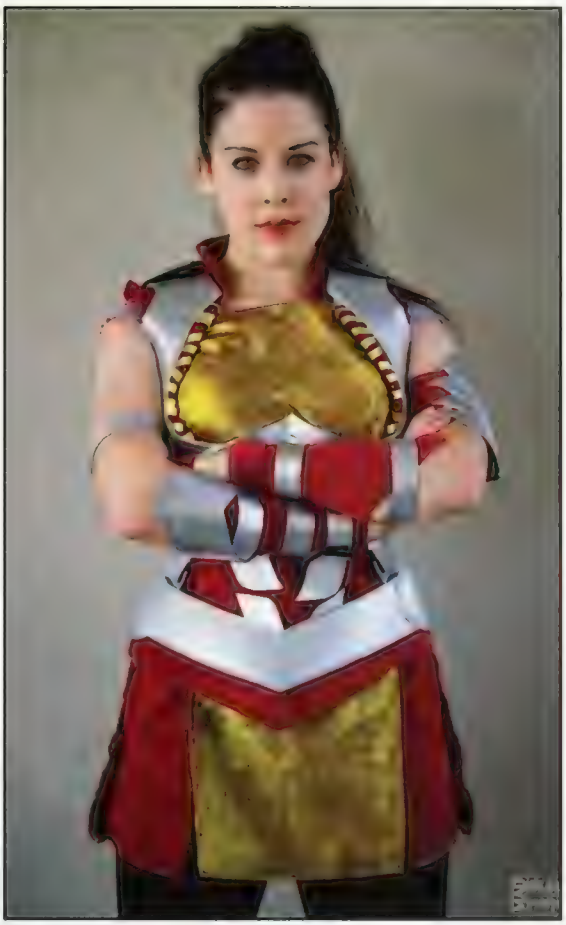
NOEL Before I start any costume, I research the hell out of it. I'll gather a lot of references, maybe an action figure, and samples of materials I might use. I'll then make a few sketches on paper (front, sides, back, details, etc.). From here comes the most difficult and important part: patterning it out. I'll usually start a pattern by taping around the subject (typically myself) and draw the costume details in permanent marker. Then I cut this out and create a nice, clean version on stock paper and/or craft foam. Once I have the pattern, the rest is cake. For my Harley Quinn, which is made entirely out of duct tape, I used this method, but omitted the paper part and used the tape as my final pattern. It was a lot of duct tape "fabric" (real fabric covered in a layer of tape), and then cut to the desired shape.

PEREZ My costumes started with items I purchased and then modified however I could with glue and paint. If that wasn't enough in the photos, I touched up my costumes on the computer. For a Lara Croft montage, for instance, I drew on the sunglass and was originally holding a comb, not a gun. To make the cat suit, I wore all black and Photoshopped on a zipper. It wasn't long before I got off my butt from in front of the computer

to make my own templates and find the raw materials to either work with myself or take to a seamstress, leatherworker, blacksmith, etc. Typically, when you're creating a getup, it's a re-creation, but sometimes it will be an original design that fits into and follows a particular genre. It's a lot of measuring, making mockups, finding proper proportions, deciding what details to include, hunting for supplies, doing tests, and tons of research—that's my favorite part.

POPTART A lot can go into a costume, because I believe the devil is in the details. After researching the costume and deciding which version to do, I need some kind of visual reference. The absolute best reference I've gotten has come from action figures. Finding the right materials is usually the toughest part, because not everything can be found at your local craft and fabric store. Certain fabrics have a certain weight, and something may look good on a bolt but doesn't move right for photos, so finding the right materials can sometimes be more difficult than making the costume. Once I have a sketch, reference, and the right materials, I get to work either drafting a pattern or draping on my sewing mannequin.

QUINN With the exception of my Leia metal bikini (by Dragonfyre Designs), I make all my own costumes. When I first started, that did mean finding pieces at thrift shops and altering them, or buying a body suit and altering that (heck, I still do that sometimes). But increasingly, my costumes are made more and more from absolute scratch. I really hate shopping.



COSTUMERS ONCE REPRESENTED A MUCH SMALLER PERCENTAGE OF CONVENTION ATTENDEES. WHY DO YOU THINK COSPLAYING HAS BECOME SO PREVALENT, AND HOW HAS THE MEDIA PLAYED A ROLE?

GOMEZ People are starting to realize that this is a fun thing. And, hey, you don't have to wait until Halloween to dress up!

NOEL Going to cons and being immersed in the culture, while dressed up as a character that someone has loved, is almost like being a mini-celebrity! I think that at first, people may have been apprehensive about dressing up as a favorite comic hero or anime 'toon, because in our society it's considered something children do, or is only okay on Halloween. But in recent years, it's become more accepted and getting very popular. Just look at the movie industry. The comic book hero was totally revamped when Christopher Nolan updated Batman. He opened the door and said it's okay for people to come out with their love of comics and fandom. And let's be honest, there is a little geek in almost all of us.

PEREZ There are many reasons to cosplay, and media coverage helps feed the majority of them. The more the media shows the enjoyment of something, be it role-playing or the artistry of costumery and makeup, the more would-be cosplayers could be inspired. Those seeking attention may get some, but the belief you will obtain any real fame or money is not true. Few make a living as costume/prop makers for cosplay, or get part-time model work. But the greatest draw for most is finding a community of like-minded people to share and collaborate with. And with so many more artists selling cosplay creations online, it's never been easier to attend conventions in costume.

POPTART I was surprised to see it jump so much, especially since comics were experiencing a slump (I used to manage a comic shop, and I remember the industry taking a huge hit with lost readers), and it seemed attendance at shows was even waning. I think that comic-related movies really helped push people more into comics. And then, as audiences started to respond,

more comic movies and TV series were being made, until I'm fairly convinced that now, Hollywood execs just shop San Diego Comic-Con for their next blockbuster.

QUINN Everyone has caught on to how much fun this is! There are also more conventions now, so more people have an opportunity to suit up. Media does play a part, because the more Web sites with cosplay features there are, the more cosplay makes it out into the world, and the more people who want to join in. I will, however, say cosplay is down at conventions like SDCC—but I blame that on how hard it is to get tickets, hotels, etc.

BLANDER Yes, when I talk to folks who've been cosplaying longer than me, they also have told me how there were so few cosplayers in their early days of con-going. I think the appeal is the ability to live out a fantasy, and when you see others doing it and getting positive feedback, then that only more encourages one to go for something they've probably always wanted to do, but were unsure about how others would react.

DARLING I've been going to the local cons here in Dallas since 2004, and it took me nearly six years to finally decide to dress in costume. I've been self-conscious most of my life, so the thought of being in costume in public never crossed my mind. Yet I saw kids doing it at these events in small numbers, and they had fun with it and didn't give a fuck about what anyone else thought. I figured that was a pretty cool attitude to have, and if these kids could do it, why couldn't I? In comparison to then, cosplaying numbers have most definitely grown, and I think because of a key reason: the "geek-culture" phenomenon. Had I known that everything I used to get made fun of for as a young'n would be so popular as an adult, it would have made junior high more tolerable.

ESPIN I feel like the media definitely has a hand in the increase in cosplayers at cons, no doubt, but in my mind, they're not the biggest influence. That's the cosplayers themselves! I remember the first time I went to NYCC. I wasn't in costume—I was in a t-shirt, taking photos with people dressed as my favorite characters. Those people had me intrigued. If they could dress as Darth Vader, why couldn't I? If he could be a Ghostbuster, you damn well best believe I could be one, too.

In 2012, the Internet was abuzz regarding the negativity aimed at "fake geek girls." Have you encountered this bias?

PEREZ Since I was a teenager, I've been going to comic shops, air shows, etc., and there were always guys turning to me to say, "What are you doing here?" I had no realization that those around me expected that I couldn't or shouldn't be a geek. I simply ignored the comments and weird looks, being accustomed to being the odd duck in the room, growing up a tomboy and being a "two-eyed freak" (I was the only one not wearing glasses in my classes at school). People are still surprised at my interests, but the remarks implying I was abnormal and not belonging have stopped. There has not been anyone that's openly attacked my geek cred personally, and I hope there never will be, for their sake.

POPTART I was unaware of this whole "fake geek girl" fiasco, and finally looked into it, and my initial reaction was one of anger, and then just shock at the audacity of some people. Reading some of this childish diatribe just made me think someone got rejected and didn't take it very well. For whatever reason, a person in skimpy clothing can be called into question, from their personal morals to whether or not they read the comics their character is from. But drawing a person in a skimpy costume, for most fans, is a win-win situation and usually brings about praise. Rarely do I hear of a case where the artist is being questioned about their morals, or if they know everything about that character. "Did you read all the previous issues? Did you interview their creator? Did you live as the character for a solid month before you drew her?" No. Why? Because that's asinine.

QUINN To be honest, I haven't personally encountered much of this type of behavior. I think it's because I started doing this when I was but a wee teenager, so I think people seeing me and Tallest Silver sort of grow up doing this helps quell those comments. That said, I will occasionally get the Tumblr troll saying something along those lines, but it's just a troll who wouldn't be saying it if the controversy hadn't popped up. Until everyone started making a stink about who's a "real" nerd or not, I actually never had it questioned. I don't think that's because people were just being nice—I think that's because honestly, people didn't care. But the community is bigger and now it's a thing.

BLANDER I've only encountered one situation where someone tried to test me to see if I was a "true" fan of who I was cosplaying. I was walking past a couple, and the woman said I looked beautiful in my Scarlet Witch costume, and the husband proceeded to ask me questions to see if I really knew about my character, or if I was just wearing the costume for attention. I explained to him that I understood fully why he was questioning me and I found it offensive, since I'm sure no one is asking questions for him to answer to prove he is worthy to be at a comic convention. His wife laughed and he just apologized—then asked someone to take a picture of all three of us!

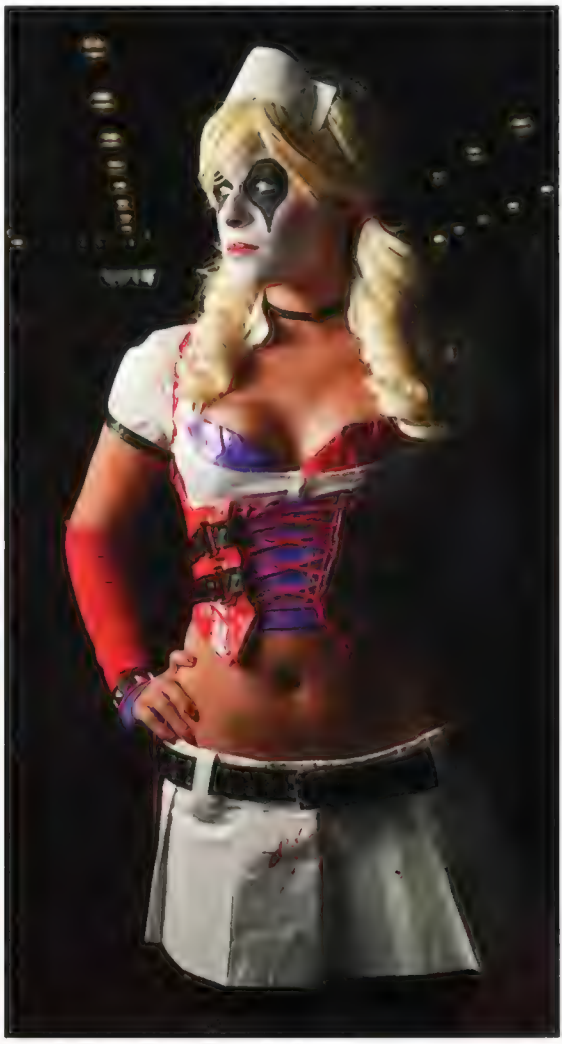
DARLING I remember seeing rants and posts about that subject on the damned Facebook. People went all nuts about "fake geek girls." I didn't read the articles. I'm assuming it was intended to push some people's buttons, and it did. I'm not fake. I mean, I'm as real as anything else living and breathing on this planet. Who cares about someone's opinions pissing off so-and so? It's the goddamn Internets—ain't nobody got time for that! I don't attempt to put myself out there with labels, either. Labels can be thrust upon people for easier grouping, but I wear no pins.

ESPIN The whole "fake geek girl" thing is a bit much. I feel like girls get a bad rep in general for cosplaying, and I feel like it's mostly because of the

audience. The majority of the cons' audience is made up of males. It's tough for a female in the comics world, especially since the majority of them are portrayed wearing barely anything at all. It's a subject that goes deeper than the "fake geek girls" thing. Some of my friends in the Ghostbusters show are not only the geekiest people I know, but they're women and I know they've been accused of acting it up. It's ridiculous that someone assumes that because you're a woman, you're not allowed to dress up as Han Solo, too!

GOMEZ Yes, I've heard this buzz, and honestly, I don't take it personally because I feel like I don't have to prove myself to anyone. The people who really know me know that I'm a real fan, down to my core. We girls can't be intimidated by this. We need to keep doing what we're doing, and they will see who we really are sooner or later.

NOEL As a female in the geek world, I'm already different, because there just aren't as many of us girls as dudes. And since it's human nature to react negatively to things that are different, I have, on occasion, received unwanted attention or disrespect. But living in New York City for the last 10 years has helped me develop a pretty thick skin, and that kind of attention no longer has an effect on me. When I do receive negative attention, I either ignore it or kill it with some honey—say something between sarcasm and making them feel bad. Ninety percent of the time, you can't really help those people. They are going to be jerks because they are, and you're not responsible for their low self-esteem.



HANDLEY: WHY DO FEMALE COSPLAYERS HAVE A HARDER TIME EARNING RESPECT FOR WHAT THEY DO? AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION SO THAT FEMALE FANS ARE TREATED FAIRLY?

POPTART How can we ensure fair treatment to all? I think we're wrestling with that daily in so many aspects of life. Just look at how we are still fighting for the right for people to marry whom they wish. For cosplayers, focus on you and your craft. Take constructive criticism, ignore the haters. Get better, faster, stronger, in your confidence and your mindset. Be your own hero. Understand that this is a minefield wrought with all sorts of insecure people. Sometimes, it's a fellow jealous cosplayer; other times, it's a rude fan. I'm criticized for my modeling and my acting; it's part of the job. Sometimes, I can take the criticism and I get better. Other times, I know it's just someone lashing out and I ignore them. To thine own self be true. Don't ever forget that.

QUINN We can improve the situation by letting it go. Much like how they shouldn't care if that hot "fake" nerd girl is standing around doing nothing to actively impede their fun, we shouldn't let their bad attitude impede our fun. Let them be bitter little sour unhappy-pants—they're always going to be butt-hurt, so ladies, don't let it bother you. You're doing nothing wrong. Unless they're being actively rude and calling you out in public—then you should call them out on being an ass and move on.

BLANDER Many men welcome the influx of women comic fans. Once, when going up the stairs in a popular comic shop, I heard a young man tell his friend how it was nice to see more women hanging out in comic book stores. This increased interest will influence and affect the industry as a whole. Story content, costume design, and increased diversity in characters will all continue to be positively affected as the industry begins to realize that more and more women—and people of color—are comic readers, and they will make it known what appeals to them.

DARLING I don't think female cosplayers have a harder time than men in earning respect for what they do. Well, I've never encountered it. Honestly, I think female cosplayers have a harder time earning respect from other female cosplayers. Girls are catty, and way more judgmental than men, in my experience. I think the guys are too busy comparing themselves to other guys.

ESPIN The whole "fake geek girls" thing is just plain bullshit. I'm sure some people just ham it up

for attention, but who's saying guys don't do that, too?! And how would this be limited to cosplaying? There've always been naysayers. Believe me, I've heard some of them directed to me. The bias and that mentality will probably never go away, but the best way to fix that is to just ignore it completely. Cosplayers, do your thing!

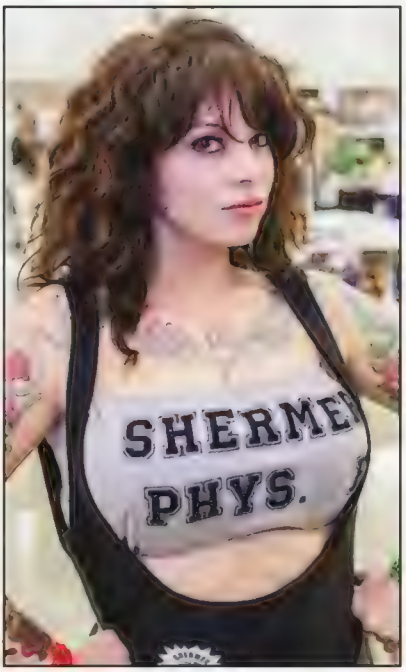
NOEL Females have almost always been seen as figures for male pleasure, and the geek world is no different. Just look at the way female characters have been designed and drawn. And then we get upset at that "fake geek girl" for dressing up exactly as Power Girl or Red Sonja was drawn! These are the characters that we have to cosplay, so why get all upset about girls dressing up as them? There are plenty of other females that have a little more fabric to choose from that girls do cosplay; they just aren't talked about as much. I actually love that girls who aren't "real" geeks are cosplaying. It means our culture is expanding to reach more people who are into different things. Why should we stop just because some guy is offended from seeing a little more cleavage?

How large a role has costuming played in the widespread acceptance of comics?

QUINN Hmm. I'm honestly not sure they're directly related. I know more cosplayers mean more media for certain characters or series, but it seems a more reactionary thing than a purely driving force behind Hollywood movie decisions. Cosplay will, however, always be a good thing, because it's always going to be a very bright and visible thank-you to the people who make the characters, comics, cartoons, and films we love.

BLANDER I think mainstream media has picked up on the fact that the comic / sci-fi crowd is a most sought-after demographic, despite the negative connotation the word "geek" once had. Let's face it, this demographic has good careers. They're computer-savvy and free-spirited, and thus Hollywood is zeroing in on them. Because they are a well-sought-after group, this means what they like and cherish is going to be exposed, and as with all situations where negativity is attached to a certain cultural lifestyle, when people proudly challenge long-held views, perceptions are going to change. When the "geek" is that handsome, well-dressed man or sophisticated, educated, accomplished, and well-dressed woman, then the word takes on a new image. This is when you see folks start to come out from hiding.

DARLING Do I think the cosplay world is responsible for fans openly embracing their comic geekdom? Not really, but I'm sure there are some who would disagree with me… there always are. I don't know if cosplay is good or bad for Hollywood or the comic industry. People make money off each other. If people want to dress as characters and make money off it, do it. If Hollywood wants to produce superhero movies and make money off fans, I'm there. To each their own — that's how I see it. However, I do know that I wouldn't have characters to dress as if it weren't for the comic book creators and Hollywood writers. They're the reason I do what I do, and love doing it.



ESPIN Comics have greatly risen up from what people would dismiss as plain childish to what it is today. I feel as though it has to do with whom comics are being targeted toward. In the '60s, when all the camp comics happened, a subculture of alternative comics occurred. Out of this, people like R. Crumb challenged the superhero-only crowd, and an audience was expanded. Then Frank Miller released *The Dark Knight Returns*, no doubt one of the most influential, important and serious comics of all time. Things like Maus would come along, or *Watchmen*. However, the campy superheroes aimed at kids joined the ride, and new audiences would come across them. And the stories became truer, full of heart, wisdom and, above all, honesty. Comics became a serious medium, one that could do what others could not, and because of that, you're guaranteed a broader, wider audience. Cosplaying is the icing on the cake when it comes to good stories.

GOMEZ I think the generations that grew up on comic books are now grown up, and they're able to freely speak about "geek stuff" without having to be scared of what people might say. It's a beautiful thing seeing what they are creating with their love for something, just like we do when we cosplay. To me, those two go hand in hand: being a fan and creating something to show how much you love it.

NOEL I think cosplay can only bring good things to the industry. People get inspired by costumes in movies, and the movie industry may even be inspired by cosplayers. Everybody loves to dress up, because everybody has something they are a fan of. Cosplaying is like having Halloween around all year long. It allows us all to be kids again, and in a place where everybody else is dressed up, too. When somebody dresses up at a con and owns it, nobody is laughing. They are all loving it with them. I like to think of cosplay as the Nutella between the two slices of bread, bringing Hollywood and the comic book industry together.

photo by Kevin Green

POPTART I'm not sure how much cosplay has caused widespread acceptance of the comic book genre. I still see a lot of negative media reducing cosplay and Comic-Cons to some sort of freak show. But it's slowly changing, and I think it's starting to bring more out of the comic closet, such as the TV show *Face Off*, having hero challenges and even going to San Diego Comic-Con and teaming up contestants with well-known comic artists, such as Jim Lee, to bring their ideas to life. The subculture is still sort of cultish in aspect, but that's part of its charm.

PEREZ Maybe in years past, guys thought it would be harder to find a girlfriend if openly comic book fans, but nowadays, seeing all the cosplay ladies around, they might realize there are plenty of women who are also into comics. Maybe female cosplayers have become pinup girls in an unintentional propaganda campaign to openly embrace their comic geekdom. Fueling an active fan base and encouraging the creators at work, I'd say, are big financial and morale boosts for the comic book industry. Loyal costuming fandoms also help attract attention to beloved but lesser-known titles for Hollywood to dip into and propel the next wave of professional make-believe. For many individuals, it's opened the door wider to following wherever their inspiration lies. I originally wanted to be a doctor, to make people happier by making them healthier. But now, I think the healthiest, easiest way for folks to find happiness is to simply follow their passions. To quote costumer BelleChere, "Let's just have fun and see where it takes us." Amen!

PLANTING THE SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION

A Conversation with Mike Mignola by *James Kuhoric*

PLANTING THE SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION

A Conversation with Mike Mignola

by James Kuhoric

Twenty years ago Mike Mignola was making one of the biggest decisions of his life. Like many of the star creators of the day, he was determined to start a series about an original character and had to decide where it had the best chance of success. He picked Mike Richardson's Dark Horse Comics as the home for the fledgling comic book, *Hellboy* and the rest is history. Two movies, a library of collected editions, and a half dozen successful spin off and related comics later, and Mignola's *Hellboy* is an institution in the comics world.

I had an opportunity to speak with Mignola about *Hellboy*, future projects, feature films, and an encounter that made a big impression on me many years ago.

Just about the same time that Mike Mignola was seeing *Hellboy: Seeds of Destruction #1* premiere in comic shops, I was taking my first steps transitioning from comic book fandom into the ranks of the industry as a professional. Choosing not to follow my college career into counseling, I stepped into the business of comic book distribution and began learning the ins and outs of the comics world. One of my first business trips was to Portland to meet with Mike Richardson, and on the way to that meeting I had the pleasure of lunching with their new creator, Mike Mignola. It was during that meeting, seeing his passion for his creation that my own seeds of desire to eventually write comics would be sewn. Mike was brainstorming ways to get fans introduced to his book and all the time whirring about on other stories he was formulating for Hellboy. The passion he had for the project was contagious and now, nearly two decades later, it is easy to look across the shelves at the local comic shop at the monolith that Hellboy has carved into

the landscape. So many of Mike's ideas were realized and had the opportunity to grow that now, the name "Hellboy" is as recognizable as the old school superhero titans of the comics field.

When I mentioned the meeting to Mike and the impact it had on me, he was bemused and kind enough not to tell me that he had no recollection of the lunch. But it was his creativity and passion for his projects that made the impression on me and he still continues to do so with his many series at Dark Horse. As we talked about those early days, I noted that 2014 will be the official 20th anniversary of *Hellboy: Seed of Destruction* and asked if there were any big related projects in the works to commemorate it. Mike said that he ***"...hadn't really given it any thought. There was talk about doing a new book that could possibly be partly commemorative but I really didn't plan to make a special book celebrating it."***

As we talked about the intricacies of the *Hellboy* and *B.P.R.D.* tales, I reiterated that the one thing I always really enjoyed about them was the strength of the interwoven world he created. It just seemed like there were so many seeds coming out of the first *Hellboy* comics that it grew into a universe from that initial event. Mike liked the call back to "seeds" and although it wasn't originally intended, said that ***"it had become quite apropos that the first series would be called 'Seed of Destruction.' The second series was always intended to drop other characters in. It was never really in my plans to expand the series initially. I was actually very nervous about first doing the B.P.R.D. series without Hellboy in it. There was always uncertainty about how fans would react to the other characters on their own."***

But it was those characters alongside Hellboy that would develop one of the most well respected lines of fairytale and folklore inspired stories in all of comics. So rich was the use of these iconic tales that one could expect to learn some obscure myth surrounding a creature of legend in each new series. His folklore tales were incredibly vibrant. One could even draw some parallels to thematically similar mythologies that Stephen King created in the *Gunslinger* series over a similar time period. Seeing Hellboy fighting harsh witches and elemental demons was expected, but the detail of his dark mythology would deliver captivating tales that went far beyond the everyman's understanding of that type of storytelling. As we discussed the importance of folklore in the Hellboy world, I asked Mike if he felt his work inspired others in comics and film to create projects that center on such imagery. ***"I don't think so,"*** he said frankly, ***"I haven't actually seen the shows like Grimm and Once Upon A Time to know if they are similar, but my gut instinct says that they were more likely influenced by Bill Willingham's Fables than Hellboy."***

In discussing television and film it is impossible not to touch on Mignola's strong career contributing to movies. In 1992 he developed design work on Francis Ford Coppola's gothic horror masterpiece,

IN PANDEMONIUM THE OTHER PRINCES DISCOVERED THAT HE HAD THE HAND, LEARNED OF YOUR BIRTH, AND WHAT HE WAS BOUND TO CREATE...
"THEY EVOKED ANGELS OF DESTRUCTION...

Bram Stoker's Dracula. He also was a concept artist for *Atlantis: The Lost Empire, Blade II,* and Pixar's *Brave*. But perhaps what he is most well-known for are the *Hellboy* films and animated features. With Guillermo del Toro directing those theatrical features, Hellboy attained the most mainstream recognition to date. Wanting to satisfy my own curiosity, I asked if there were any plans for new feature films in the future. ***"Actually none of that has anything to do with me,"*** Mignola said chuckling, ***"As far as I know there is nothing serious in the works being talked about. But I'm curious to see if anything does get done."*** I think the legion of Hellboy fans would also agree in being very curious to see what else ends up being produced. For many mainstream fans, the movies were the gateway to discovering the world of *Hellboy* comics and trades.

Several years back, before *The Walking Dead* was a phenomenon, Mike Mignola had a zombie series at Dark Horse that did the undead up right. Filled with high energy undead violence, *ZombieWorld* was one of those books that real zombie fans rank up there with George Romero's best works. I wondered, almost to myself, if we'd ever see more from that world in the future. Mignola answered with an interesting reply. ***"I've done pretty much everything I wanted to do with ZombieWorld and I gave it to Dark Horse. It's their book to do what they want with now. But some of the original ideas I had were incorporated into B.P.R.D. arcs where they fit perfectly."*** For a moment I likened working on *ZombieWorld* to Mike's Marvel and DC work and asked if he ever wanted to revisit any characters from either company. He replied frankly, saying ***"Honestly I can't imagine ever going back [to Marvel***

or DC]. As soon as I was able to do my own stuff I knew I wasn't going back to another publisher. I control the characters and would not want to go back to asking someone else to see what I can or can't do. I was a fan of Marvel originally, but most of the characters I liked aren't that recognizable anymore."

And that suits Mike and his fans just fine. Over the course of the last twenty years, Mignola has won just about every comics award there is. He's become a fan favorite and been introduced to multiple generations of new readers with the library of Dark Horse *Hellboy* trade paperbacks. In addressing his popularity, Mignola says he is humbled by fan reaction to his work. *"I am so appreciative of the fans. They have made it possible for me to focus on my projects for the better part of the last two decades. It is amazing and unbelievable."* And you have to feel good for a creator who is genuine about the role the fans play in his success and at the same time in awe of their loyalty. For me, talking with Mike made it clear he is very in touch with the realities of the industry and appreciative of the place he has carved out in it.

The latest series, *Hellboy in Hell* has been a major success, building off the unexpected death of Hellboy in *Hellboy: The Fury #3*. *Hellboy in Hell* marks the return of Mike Mignola as both writer and artist of the series that has really defined his long and fruitful career. But Mignola remains tightlipped about what is in store next for everyone's favorite red monster fighter. *"Hellboy in Hell #5 is almost done. It took much longer than I thought it would and I'm pretty excited in finishing the series through issue #8. What comes next? There's a mini-series I'm writing for 2014 and the new Hellboy: Midnight Circus Graphic Novel coming out in October."* The *Midnight Circus* original graphic novel tells the story of a young Hellboy who runs away from the B.P.R.D. and joins a demonic circus. Written by Mignola, we can expect that story to have the wonderful spirit that makes all of Hellboy's adventures feel so relatable.

It has been a fantastic run for Hellboy over the past twenty years. And if anything came through in my conversation with creator Mike Mignola, it's that telling the stories has been a labor of love for him and we can expect that to continue as the "seeds of destruction" are sewn for the next two decades.

RUSH: WRITING THE PLAYBOY RACER

Peter Morgan On The Rivalry In Ron Howard's *Rush*

by Brendon Connelly

Peter Morgan has made both a habit and reputation out of crafting finely tuned fictions out of real life people and events. He's perhaps best known around the world for *Frost/Nixon*, but his series of films about Tony Blair - *The Deal, The Queen,* and *The Special Relationship* - have certainly garnered more than their fair share of coverage and discussion in Morgan's native England.

His latest film is a sports biopic, his second after *The Damned United*. This time he's telling the story of racing car drivers Niki Lauda and James Hunt and their high-stakes rivalry played out on the tracks of Formula One Grand Prix. I'm reluctant to give away too much, but fans of the sport will certainly be aware of some of the terrible situations the two found themselves speeding into at two hundred deadly miles an hour.

In *Rush*, Ron Howard's film of Peter Morgan's screenplay, Niki Lauda is played by *Inglourious Basterd*'s Daniel Bruhl and James Hunt, the racing playboy, has been brought to life by *Thor*'s Chris Hemsworth. There's no denying that this casting plays a big role in the movie, but really, this is Morgan's film, born out of his passion for the story, honed with his well-known flair for this style of material.

So here's what he had to tell me about the genesis of the project and how tricky it is to tell true life adventure stories like this.

MORGAN My agent rang me up and asked if I'd be interested in a story about Formula One in the 1970s, and I thought probably not. But a call was booked with an American producer for two days later so I did a little research and, of course, came across the rivalry between Niki Lauda and James Hunt. I have a strong connection to Austria, I was living in Vienna at the time

and I actually know Niki so I thought, "This is fantastic because it's both a way to do a story about the place that I'm living in and also someone like James Hunt," who I understood because I grew up in the UK.

But then the phone call came and they actually said "Do you want to write about Jackie Stewart?" and I said "Not even Jackie Stewart's mother wants to see a film about Jackie Stewart."

When you make a choice as a writer about what it is you're going to write and what it is you're going to spend six months thinking about, you have to fall in love. I just didn't fall in love with the idea of Jackie Stewart. He is a great champion, but I didn't feel there was stuff I wanted to write about or which I could emotionally connect with.

And that was it, we parted company and I started writing this film instead, by myself.

I went to see Niki in Ibiza, which is where he lives a lot of the time. We talked for about four hours - well, he did. I love the way he talks. I promise you, the way I have him in the film is so Niki. I'd ask "Did you like anyone in Formula One?" and he'd say "No." "What were they like?" "Assholes."

James Hunt's family were quite nervous, but we met for dinner and gradually, bit by bit, they came around. Ron Howard is just the most delightful human being and the most ethical man and I think the Hunt family looked in his eyes and saw that he wasn't just out to talk about James Hunt in bed, or whatever else he did out of professional racing.

Something Ron and I also confronted with *Frost/Nixon* and I with *The Queen* is the question of "Did they actually say this to one another?" As soon as you're going off matters of public record you do have to rely on a writer's imagination. An audience will reject it if you get it wrong, I find. And the audience is very suspicious and very finely tuned to this. I'm sure that anyone can think

of films where they've rejected it, where "I don't know if this feels true, I'm not sure if I buy that, there's too much of the writer in this." Niki had strong and complicated feelings for James and they were both rivalrous and shared admiration, but he never said James was the only person he envied, that was something I wrote because, having talked to him for so many hours, that's what I felt. I thought there were things about James Hunt's masculinity that Niki envied.

The scene I was most concerned about was the one with Niki and his grandfather at the very beginning. I really wanted to make sure that I had it right before I wrote that scene of somebody effectively telling his grandson to leave the house and not come back, personal and powerful stuff.

With this I was just interested in the yin and yang of these two guys. To me, the racing is secondary, but I am still amazed by how beautifully they've filmed it. It's just astonishing work with the camera.

Now that we are in the publicity phase with this film there are occasions where we should be turning up at Grand Prix but I find myself making every possible excuse not to. I don't understand it. There is something about Grand Prix, and the battle in adapting it into a film, I felt, was that it could come across as just boys and toys. It doesn't have the poetic, metaphoric grandeur of boxing where two men are just hitting each other and it's even more moronic but somehow it's more elemental.

And while I didn't know it at the time I spoke with Morgan, it just so happens that he was secretly working on a new film about boxers, a new 3D movie with director Ang Lee that will recount some of the great bouts of the late 70s. From his closing comments, I think he must be really enjoying that one.

Rush is released in the UK on September 13th and in the US on September 27th.

KIERON GILLEN

Über™

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A NEW UNITY

A Closer Look at Valiant's New Super Team

By James Kuhoric

A NEW UNITY
by James Kuhoric

In 1992, Valiant 1.0 was on top of the world. Their fresh new comic series were being established and reaching a very diverse fan base. At the end of a record-breaking successful year of publication, they launched *Unity*, a major crossover that brought their characters together and helped to introduce the *Eternal Warrior* and *Archer & Armstrong* comics. It was hailed as one of the best series of the year and was successful in bringing all of the Valiant Universe characters together in one powerful story arc.

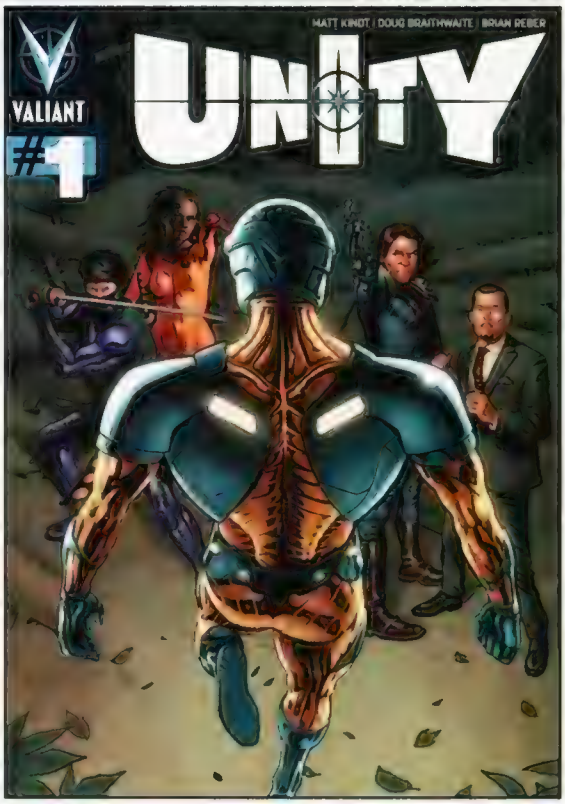
It is easy to assume that a new *Unity*, one built around a carefully crafted and re-vamped Valiant universe, would be similarly based. Maybe it is another event meant to unify their characters and spin a couple new series out of? Or even a way for them to make sure that Valiant fans are exposed to all the various characters of the line in one package? All these things crossed my mind, and they are all wrong.

The new *Unity* isn't an event or fleeting story arc at all, it is a brand-new ongoing series that, for all intents and purposes, creates the "Valiant Avengers." Interested? I certainly was. This new series is a call to arms in the Valiant universe for heroes and villains to come together to destroy a king. Toyo Harda is a dangerous man who fears nothing. But even he can't ignore the threat that X-0 Manowar brings to all life on the planet. With a weapon that is the most devastating technology in the universe in the hands of a warrior king, the balance of global power is teetering toward oblivion. And that does strike fear into the heart of one of the world's most influential men. Which is why he is organizing the deadliest team the world has ever known. And his plan is as old as history itself: He wants to kill the king.

So what prompted Valiant to try to bring together a group of heroes that, to this point, have been at odds with each other in the reimagined universe? Valiant

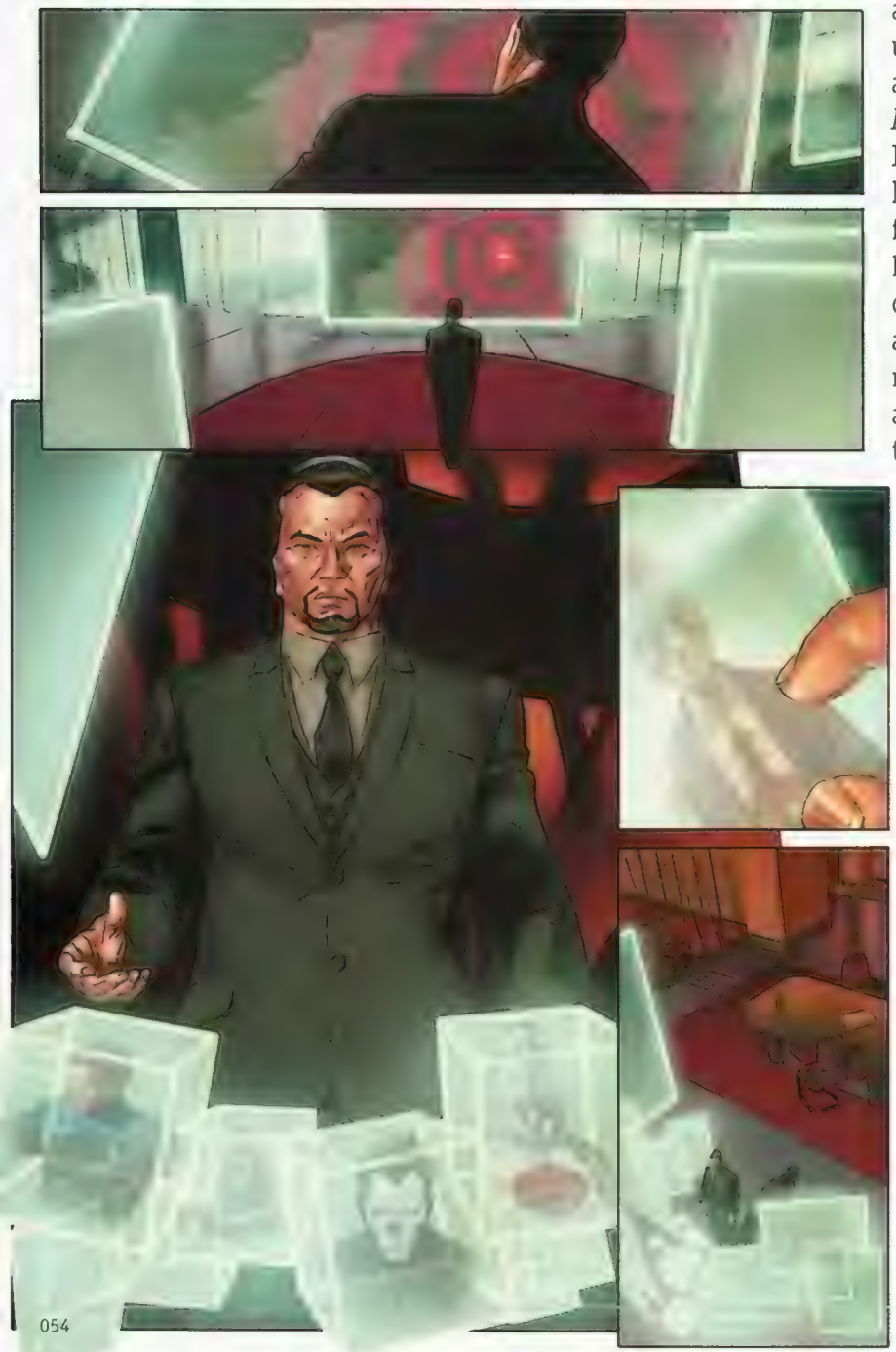
CCO, Dinesh Shamdasani told me that they "...wanted to do something that had never been done before. We wanted to honor the original *Unity* concept by doing something revolutionary that would promise to leave the Valiant Universe irrevocably changed. Bringing together a super team of Valiant's biggest heroes against the man armed with the most powerful weapon in the universe promises to do just that."

Valiant is embracing this series with an impressive lineup of creators that very clearly illustrate how big this new book will be. New York Times bestselling writer, Matt Kindt of *Mind MGMT* and *Justice League of America,* is taking the scripting reins and is being joined by illustrator Doug Braithwaite of *Journey into Mystery* fame. And with artistic industry titans like JG Jones, Bryan Hitch, and the one and only Neal Adams doing the honors on the various cover



treatments, *Unity* is feeling more and more like it is a universe defining project. And indeed, with the talent lined up on this, it would seem poised to give anything that Marvel or DC have coming up a serious run for the money. I asked series artist Doug Braithwait how, in putting together all of Valiant's "big guns" into one book for the first time, he planned to give each character their moment to shine and what surprises he may have in store in upcoming issues. Braithwaite told me that "As a team book, there will be the usual problems of giving each character their 'moment' within the framework of the group. Just by the very nature of the strong-minded individuals involved in *Unity* you are guaranteed a certain amount of friction, and it's going to be interesting to see how they bounce off each other. They'll all get their chance in the limelight but I can't give anything away. Suffice to say Matt has some major surprises in store and maybe some revelations that will shake the Valiant Universe's foundations to its core."

Kindt and Braithwaite have their hands full with fans expecting something that both honors the original *Unity* and provides an exciting new vision to go along with the revamped Valiant universe. I asked Executive Editor Warren Simmons how Valiant matched these two rising stars with the creative for the project and how they planned to handle the coming together of so many unique characters into this super team. "*Unity* is the very first super team in the Valiant Universe and with good reason. The Valiant Universe isn't a place where the most powerful men and women hang out in penthouses waiting for the '*Unity* Phone' to ring. These are heroes with power that can make or break the world, and what they do is going to have consequences, and you need a creative team that can bring an element of gravity to the title. Matt Kindt – as anyone whose read *Mind MGMT* will tell you – is an exceptional talent, a truly great writer who put together an amazing story for us. When Matt just absolutely nailed *Bloodshot # 0* for us, I was very confident he'd be a great fit for *Unity*. And Doug Braithwaite is one of the most talented artists working in the medium today. He's a tremendous storyteller and exceptional draftsman, and the pages he's turning in are breathtaking, from a design and composition standpoint to the kinetic action of each panel. I couldn't be happier to have him on board at Valiant." I think fans will agree with Simmons that this creative team up is almost as exciting as the project itself.



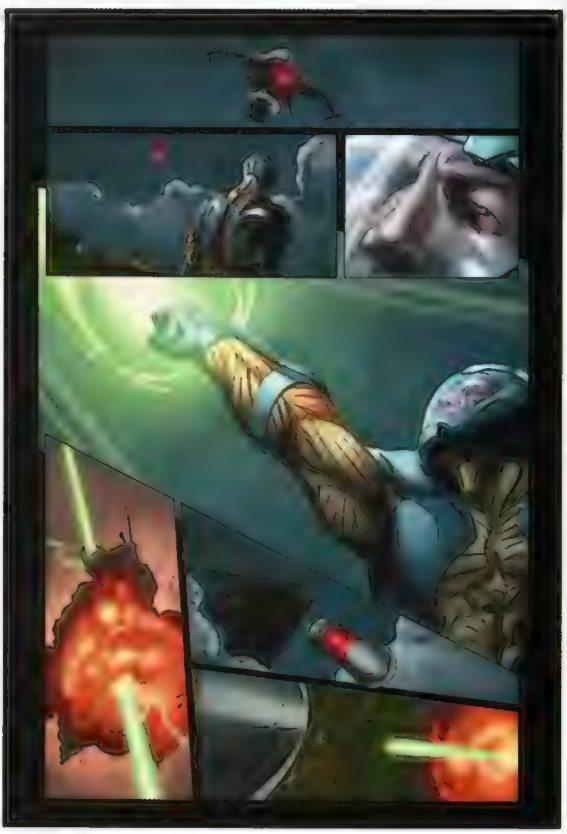
One of the things that have sparked heated speculation is whether or not the events of *Unity* will

give birth to new Valiant characters or series. Simmons helps to fuel those fires by saying "You'll definitely see some characters getting spotlighted that people have been asking for, especially Ninjak. Matt Kindt is having a blast with everyone's favorite mercenary superspy and most lethal operative. Harada may lead the team but Ninjak may just steal the show. And Livewire is making her return for the first time since her betrayal of Toyo Harada in the pages of *Harbinger*. So there'll be some tension there, fans of hers will get a chance to see that relationship develop. And by issue five you can expect to see some new faces with new allies and enemies making their way into the book."

The future for X-0 Manowar may not look too bright with the Valiant Universe's big-bad at the helm of the team that is trying to take him down. According to Simmons, the decision to cast their most prominent villain as the leader was a key to developing the new *Unity* storyline. "Everyone sees themselves as the hero of their own own story," he explains. "That's what makes the 'Homecoming' storyline in *X-0 Manowar* such a compelling inciting event. 1,600 years ago, suiting up in armor, riding into a foreign country, and carving out a piece of it for yourself made perfect sense. It's how civilizations were built. And it's exactly what Aric of Dacia is doing. Toyo Harada survived Hiroshima, and is determined to make the future one where that will never happen again. Aric lives by the sword and Harada wants to make a future where no one rules by one. They both see themselves as heroes but it remains to be seen which of them can truly claim that title."

With *Unity* poised to change the very nature of the Valiant universe, we have to wonder if it will change the status quo of this fledgling world or if its very existence will signify sweeping changes to what has come thus far. Shamdasani described the upcoming changes and how they would impact the world. "*Unity* as a whole represents a massive tipping point for Valiant, both as company and a shared universe," he states. "We've seen corners of the universe intersect briefly in *Harbinger Wars* and some of the monthly titles, but *Unity* really is the first time that a coalition of heroes, once independent of one another, come together for a single cause. Of course, they might all have a different idea about what that cause truly is..."

The new *Unity* title from Valiant seems to tie the past and present universes together perfectly with a common thematic element. And this new series is a great place for fans that haven't yet stepped into the Valiant universe to get a front row seat for what appears to be a groundbreaking title. Much in the way that 1992's *Unity* helped usher in a new era of mainstream interest in the Valiant universe, this new series presents similar opportunities for today's readers to experience a vibrant world of unique characters for the first time.



WHAT IF...?

by Rich Johnston

Parallel universes. We know the score. We've seen *Sliders*. We've read *Earth Two*. But what if we applied all those lessons we've learned to the comics industry? What if... we "What Ifed" it? Took the roads not travelled, the lessons not learned, the wrongs righted and the rights wronged?

It still starts in the late thirties, of course. As the two naive cartoonists, Siegel and Shuster, are shipping their *Superman* strip around, finding rejection from publisher to publisher. Except this is "Earth Two." And Siegel took a course in business school and Shuster studied a little law. Not only did that give them a better understanding of what they might be signing, but also a little more confidence, a little more je ne sais quoi, that makes Wheeler-Nicholson of National Allied Press go against his nature and lets them add a few ownership clauses to the contract. Some percentages of gross merchandising. A little Independent auditing. After all, what's the harm? Millions of sales and a radio show later, National Allied Press sees the harm, but hey, everyone's making money. Siegel and Shuster can even afford to buy their way out of military service, though they keep an eye on Superman and continue his battle against the Nazis. This Superman is also a lot less obsessed with businessmen... if anything they are more likely to be the good guys,

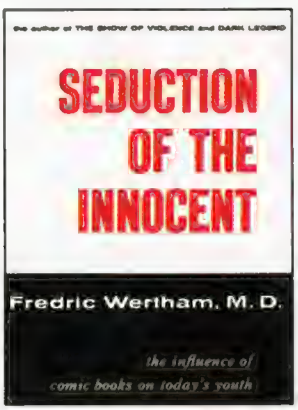
It's a lesson that National Allied Press learns when a young Bob Kane brings his idea for a superhero based on a bat. The contract is a lot harsher and split between writer Bill Finger, and later Jerry Robinson, so as to divide and conquer. The later arguments between the three would ensure National, later DC, stayed in control of Batman forever. This decision would later haunt them, but would ensure the survival of the character after the events sixty years ahead...

But no skipping. We're still in the late thirties and things are looking good for comic creators.

Jack Kirby has picked up on the vibe as well, when he and Joe Simon start up *Captain America* a few years later at Timely Comics, and a young Stan Lee starts writing for them. Creators are becoming less like freelance skivvies and more like publishing partners.

And a little money sloshing around different wallets does make for changes after the war. More money means security, healthcare, better clothes, more appeal, a greater social scene, hell, even the newspaper strip guys are getting jealous. The entertainment scene notices and for a short while, they get coverage in the society papers. The stigma of the medium is diminishing, and the money starts to attract the better known newspaper comic strip artists as well. Alex Raymond starts to draw horror comics.

Which means when Dr. Frederick Wertham writes *Seduction Of The Innocent*, it makes even more of an impact. But, when Congress comes calling, a much better defence with famous names making the case for freedom of speech, increased literacy, and points to a growing older audience for comic books, with Alex Raymond charming the media. And why interview William Gaines when you have the charismatic, patriotic Jack Kirby to put on the stands?



It's a rout, and William Gaines gets to keep publishing his EC Comics horror and crime titles. And Timely views Jack Kirby in a new light, as a potential new figurehead. Much of the celebrity fades of course, and the media moves on, and the horror and

crime comics start to fade in popularity. Television is more deserving of the censors' ire now.

National Comics begin their bestselling title, taking characters from across their range and combining them into their *Crime Fighting League of America*, and merging the popular crime books with the superheroes of old.

Timely, now Atlas, sees their success, that star treatment is remembered and Jack Kirby is given full reign at the company – now about to be known forever as Marvel Comics. But rather than focus on crime superhero stories, he goes to his own true love, horror and monster comics.

And Jack Kirby takes Stan Lee, who he now regards as his own personal assistant. Together, they create The *Ferocious Four*, a comic about four monsters trying to be superheroes. Led by The Thing, we have Mr Ferocious, a man who can stretch his physique into many horrible forms, the Human Torch, a fiery demon who is reminiscent of the flaming torches that used to be held by rampaging villagers, and The Invisible Freak, a woman so ashamed by her hideous appearance that she remains invisible at all times. Their first issue fight is with The Mole Man, a villain who has a mole on his face and believes that this must mean he is evil. The Invisible Freak revealing her hellish appearance to him (though not the audience) by turning herself visible for only a second is still regarded a classic scene. Kirby hires Lee to script the comic, and work on some other ideas. And thus is born *Spider-Men*.

The publisher is initially repulsed by the idea of a man with the powers of a spider, but looks at the sales of the *Ferocious Four* and changes his mind. But to placate him, the pair creates two characters, one looking more human, a cape wearing fellow with a spider web gun, and one a monstrous eight legged beast that patrols the New York underground. This storytelling is considered a real leap forward, superheroes that have personal flaws and monsters that are driven to be heroes.

Their next book *The Mutants* takes this further, a team of monsters not created by radioactivity or magic, but born this way, growing up in a private school, and fighting others like

them. An actual Cyclops from Greek mythology, a demonic angel, a beast from Hades, a being of pure ice, and a young girl everyone thinks is just marvellous. It's a very strange looking book.

Stan Lee has too many ideas for even Jack Kirby to draw so, with his permission, the line expands with Steve Ditko's *Doctor Strange*, a withered magician given new powers, Don Heck's *Iron Man*, a disfigured scientist trapped in an full body robotic Iron Lung, *Hulk* starring a scientist exposed to a gamma bomb who becomes a walking green dripping behemoth, and *Ant Man*, with the head of an Ant who can shrink to a tiny size. Together with Kirby's *Thor*, a bearded Norse God, they also create a new title, *The Avengers*, which also led to the return of *Captain America*, and Joe Simon writing that spinoff title, as he fights communist monsters threatening the USA borders, and emerging from under people's beds.

Even Siegel and Shuster's Superman starts getting in on the act, every issue seeing him transformed into a hideous creature, leading to the spin-off book *Supermonster*, and for Batman to become a real "Bat Man." The spin-off TV series stars Adam West in full prosthetic make up, a horror show for kids which gains a cult audience. However other books spearheaded by Julie Schwartz keep the crime links. A renewed Flash is a policeman given super-speed, which he registers with the government and becomes a super-cop, the Green Lantern is now part of an interstellar police force. And the Martian Manhunter is created as an intergalactic bounty hunter, tracking down criminals across the universe. However unlike the superhero tales of old, and closer to the crime line, the comics are often told from the villain's point of view, no Comics Code even suggested stopping it.

Kirby becomes a star again, but decent pay means he can afford to give up some of his books. Steve Ditko's revival of *Spider-Man* is a big hit with the college students Marvel is making inroads to, as is his take on *Ferocious Four* spin-off, the politically agitating *Silver Surfer*, judging planets he visits in very black and white terms.

Stan Lee, however, began to grow increasingly dissatisfied working at Marvel. Jack Kirby had the spotlight, creative control, and he felt promises made to him by Martin Goodman were broken. Marvel's lack of decent credit for his plotting, character design, and creation contributed, but a contract presented to him in 1970 that included prohibition against legal retaliation saw Lee object to no avail. So he left for DC Comics, under Carmine Infantino.

Here Lee began to write four books, finally engaging in pure super-heroics, as he had done in the forties, creating *New Kids, Forever Four, Mister Messenger* (based on the life of his brother Larry Lieber), and taking over *Jimmy Olsen, Supermonster's Patsy*. They were a phenomenal hit and are often considered responsible for the revival in superheroes in the industry. It's also when comics started to get more socially relevant.

While there had been many black people in comic books, they had regularly been portrayed as low level criminals. Stan Lee's introduction of the Black Panther in *Forever Four* (which many people still saw as a rip-off of the *Ferocious Four*) for DC Comics made a big difference, especially when Denny O'Neill and Neal Adams took that character and made him part of the Green Lantern Police Corps. While drug use had often been portrayed in fantasy terms, it was the realistically researched and portrayed life of a drug addict in *New Kids*

that would touch a nation, although many thought Lee's research went too far and explains his later behaviour. And the return of superheroes, now dark avengers created by satanic ritual, caused concern but merely reflected a need for heroes in the nation. Marvel's *Iron Lung* battled with nicotine addiction, and *The Mutants*, now written and drawn by Chris Claremont and John Byrne became a pit of sexual fetishisation, sado masochism, and erotic experimentation, culminating in a Hellfire Club made up of women in basques and suspenders. Shocking stuff.

But then, overnight, everything changed with *Superman*: *The Movie*, starring Christopher Reeves. Unlike the gross horrific take of the *Batman* TV series of the sixties, Reeves didn't sport any of the prosthetics that had so disfigured the character in the comic over the years. Instead, he went back to the origins of the character, as a superhero fighting for Truth, Capitalism, and The American Way. There was no sign of Supermonstrosities, instead we got a superhero more in the Stan Lee tradition. His hanging out in Hollywood had affected the film producers to look to the past, even as they told a story in the present.

The effect was huge – though tainted by protests over *Superman II* in which Superman kills Zod by throwing his broken mortal form down a bottomless shaft in his Fortress of Solitude and laughing. A young Mark Waid walks out in protest.

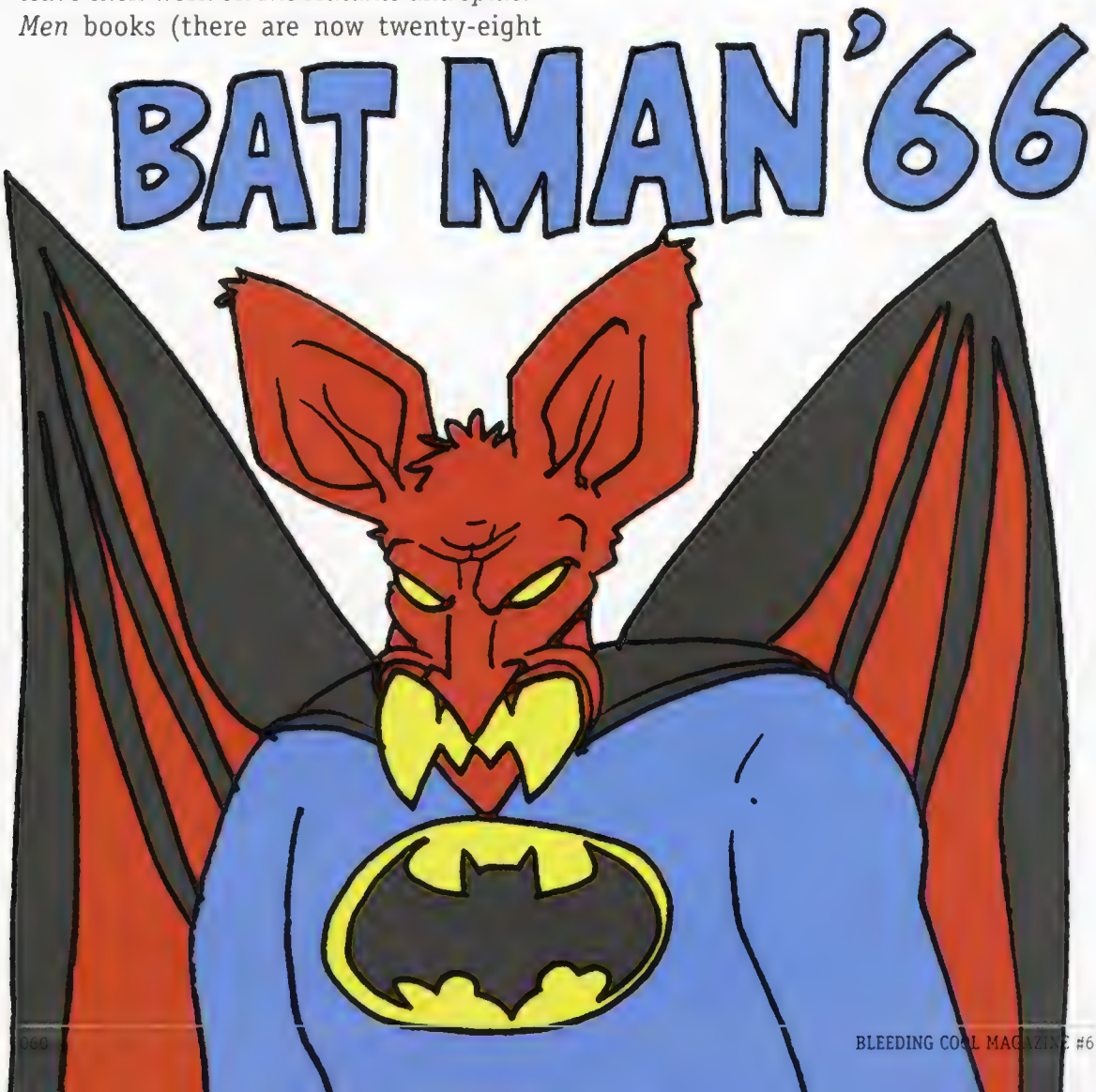
New Yorker, Frank Miller, reinvents *Batman* as a camp, optimistic bright comic book set in 1966, featuring bright colours, big sound effects and giant typewriters, collected as *The Bright Knight Returns*. A British creator called Alan Moore, who had recently revived a classic character Marvelcriminal for the UK market, had been hired for DC's horror books (inventing a conman called John *Constantine* for the series). He writes a book with a fellow Brit called *Getawaymen* that de-constructs the crime genre for DC Comics as a fun romp. They are considered a milestone in comics and inspire many light'n'brighty comics in the decades to come, though some will see them as responsible for destroying traditional comic books. Not long afterwards, and fresh from *Pee Wee Herman*, Tim Burton brings us a light'n'brighty version of the *Bat Man*, very different to what most

people think of the character, and sets in motion a series of superhero films with a positive, bright outlook.

The fight for Stan Lee to get his scripts back from Marvel continues as Jack Kirby retires and passes the torch to one Mark Evanier. Seizing the light'n'brighty vibe, Evanier hires *Mad* artist Sergio Aragones to redesign the Marvel Universe. With many creators having acknowledged legal claims on many of the characters, there is much argument and discussion but Sergio's great capacity for bringing people together finds a way to bring peace.

Come the nineties, Rob Liefeld, Todd McFarlane, Whilce Portacio, Erik Larsen, Jim Lee, Marc Silvestri, and Jim Valentino all leave their work on *The Mutants* and *Spider-Men* books (there are now twenty-eight *Spider-Men* across the line) to start a new Marvel imprint of characters that are all very similar to *The Mutants* and *Spider-Men*. As Marvel's market-share rockets, so DC decided to kill off Superman and Supermonstrosity together in a big battle fighting each other.

It's at that moment that the great massacre of Comic Con occurs. No one knows why Ted Kaczynski, now better known as the Uncaconbomber, targeted the show, killing dozens. But the fact that he read crime and horror comics as a kid doesn't go ignored by the media. The death of a number of comic creators, Rich Johnston, Terry Moore, Brian Bendis, David Mack, and more don't make a difference to the industry per se, but the mood has changed.



There's a media reaction against comic books, *Seduction Of The Innocent* is dragged up again, and publishers are bought to brook. It's decided that creator ownership and participation stops publishers imposing moral standards on their comics. A new publisher, Image Comics, is started, taking the new Marvel imprint to another publisher and corporatising it, guaranteeing company owned comics and a Comics Code to monitor standards. The charity the Comic Code Legal Defence Fund is started to fund legal fights against comics that break it.

However, despite initial success, there is a comic book slump blamed on the massacre. Light'n'brighty comics are the only ones that anyone will accept, though fans despair at the loss of the traditional perversions. Marvel's loss of the Image Comics crowd forces them to offer more creator unfriendly options of their own.

Self-publishers flock for cover. Dave Sim takes DC's offer to publish *Cerebus* (with all of its comics criminal parodies), Jeff Smith takes *Bone* to Marvel, who also hire a certain independent comics writer Dan DiDio, who broke in writing for Todd McFarlance on his Image line, to work on Marvel's newly planned Ultimate comics. He has this radical idea to reboot the entire continuity as fifty two ongoing titles and brings in the likes of Garth Ennis, Grant Morrison, and Alan Moore to work on the books.

Creators giving up their rights is music to Hollywood's ears, which goes into overdrive, creating new *Bat Men* movies, new *Supermonstrosity* sequels to the original *Superman*, *Spider-Men*, *The Ferocious Four*, *The Mutants*, all get their moment in the sun. Even that all-but-forgotten *Getawaymen* has a low budget adaptation, with Moore writing the screenplay. On the back of all of this, Joss Whedon, creator of *Buffy*, *The Real Estate Agent Killer* gets a chance to make the biggest movie of them all, *The Avengers*. All memories of the Unaconbomber are gone, comics have once again inherited the earth.

The day is now. A commemorative San Diego Comic Con has just been held, after the tragedy twenty years ago. But things are good. The comic creators of old, even Stan Lee, got their pay-offs and their families still see the benefit. But modern creators' futures have a very different outlook with lawsuits forcing them to rely on big studio legal departments. Sales are up, Rantz Hoseley's Longbox Comics embedded on all Apple iPads has put digital comics in the hands of millions, but the future is very uncertain.

But then again, isn't it always?

This is one what if. What's yours?

THE DROKKING MARTIANS ARE COMING!

By Gavin Lees

THE DROKKING MARTIANS ARE COMING!

by Gavin Lees

Judge Dredd is no stranger to crossovers. Having fought against or beside the likes of Lobo, Predator, and even Batman, he's a character whose hard-line attitude makes him a perfect foil for all manner of outlandish opponents. This September, Dredd meets his possibly most bizarre foe yet when IDW releases *Mars Attacks Judge Dredd*, and he must defend Mega City One from the oddly-goofy Martians from the Topps trading cards.

The genesis of the series goes back to the *Mars Attacks IDW* event earlier this year, with several variant covers that showcased imaginary crossovers from *Mars Attacks Madman* (by Mike and Laura Allred) to *Mars Attacks Cerebus* (by Dave Sim). The one that seemed the most likely – and which generated a good deal of enthusiasm from fans – was, of course, Greg Staples's *Mars Attacks Judge Dredd* cover. Now fans are getting what they want, courtesy of veteran Dredd creators, writer Al Ewing and artist John McCrea, in a four-part miniseries.

In the new series, the Martians – so used to a defenseless modern-day Earth – find that they have picked the wrong city to invade, and are being beaten back easily by Mega City One. They must then form an uneasy alliance with the Mob, leading to many cruel and unusual changes in the underworld, and caught in the middle of it all is Judge Dredd. In the first issue, what seems like a regular mob bust leads Dredd to find the Martians at the center of something much more sinister – engineering a new form of snuff movie where humans are pitted against giant mutant bugs. The aliens may be no match for some stumm gas, but their killer mutants might be another story.

This is Ewing's first time writing the IDW version of Dredd which, for him, has been a freeing experience: "I tend to think of him as Ultimate Dredd," says Ewing in reference to Marvel's Ultimate Universe, which provides new a new continuity for long-established characters, who often appear in radically different forms. "I enjoy bringing things in that I remember with fondness but that are all over-and-done-with in the *2000AD* Dreddworld – things like Don Uggie Apelino and The Pit get a fresh coat of paint." Long-time Dredd fans will recognise Uggie Apelino as the talking chimp in a suit, which gives some indication of the level of humour that is being brought into the series. "A lot of the camper elements of *Judge Dredd* fit very neatly into *Mars Attacks*, and vice versa. But because of the Mega-Mafia element, I can play a little with some of Dredd's noir tropes, too."

For McCrea, this series presented a different opportunity: "I've never been happy with my portrayal of Dredd," he says, "I took this book as an opportunity to remedy that, and I hope folks will like it." With the IDW stories having a younger Dredd, there is often the temptation for revisionist takes on the characters, but McCrea was keen to keep this in line with the classic character

that fans have grown to love: "I just drew the best Dredd I could and made him as kick ass as possible. I went back and looked at Mike McMahon, Ron Smith, and Ian Gibson, as their work resonates with me the most. And P.J. Holden – he's awesome."

As well as having worked on Dredd before, McCrea has the added advantage of being the current artist on IDW's ongoing *Mars Attacks* series, with writer John Layman. Even though the two series are polar opposites in terms of tone and style, he was able to find a way to make them work together. "I think the two franchises really are a good fit. That said, it's really a Dredd story as the Martians are just another problem facing Mega City One, and they've had plenty of problems!"

For Ewing, however, it meant toning down certain elements of Dredd's usual narrative, and ramping up others: "Having the Mega-Mafia involved means at least a couple of swipes at the classic *Goodfellas* tropes, but for the most part satire of the

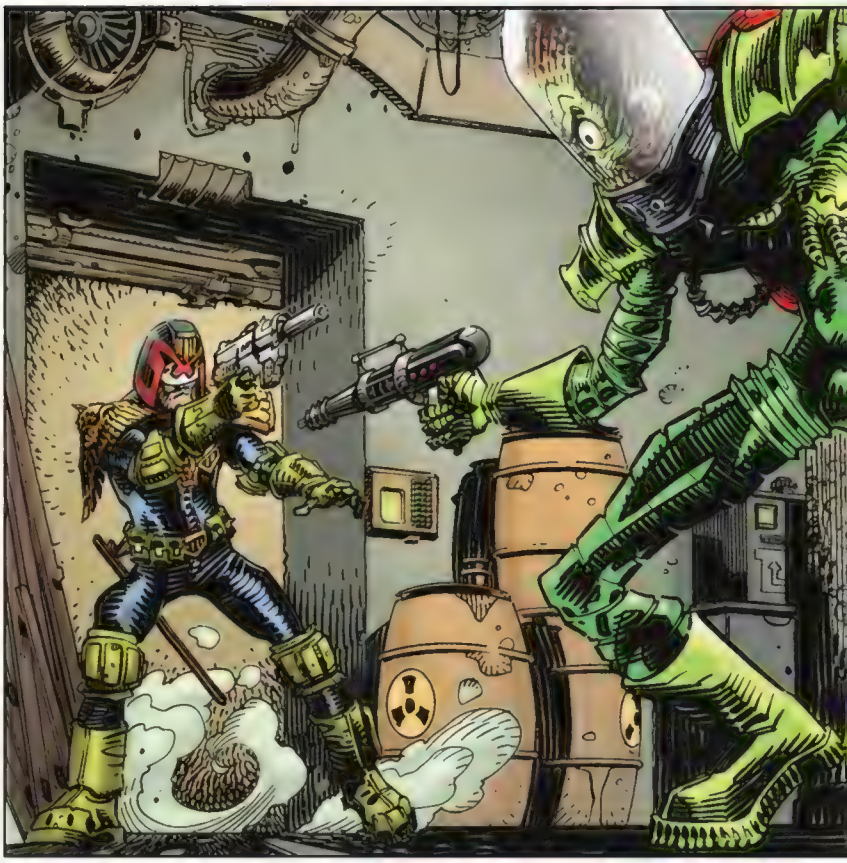
modern world takes a back seat here. I find that the satire element works best if Dredd and/or the Martians are attacking ordinary citizens, whereas if they're beating hell out of each other it's more of a straight romp."

This is not the first time that Ewing and McCrea have worked together – they produced a *Hulk* strip for the UK *Marvel Heroes*, and a digital comic for the iPhone called *Beatnik High* – and their previous experiences have built a good relationship between the two creators. "Working with John is a blast," enthuses Ewing, "he's got a unique style that can go broadly comedic or very dark and gritty, which is what's needed for something like this. Plus he already knows both worlds very well, so I can talk about things like Manta Prowl Tanks or Martian Bug Wranglers and he'll know exactly what I mean. He's great – it's a joy to work with him on a project again."

McCrea is equally complimentary, saying, "I think Al and I are a great fit, he's got a fantastic sense of humour and the absurd. I've literally been laughing out loud reading this script." Ewing is not one to miss the opportunity for a joke, and plays some of the Mafia Dons for all they're worth – Don Mumbletti, who makes an appearance in the first issue, is one of Ewing's funniest creations. A George Burns look-a-like whose unintelligible mutterings seem to be understood by everyone except the reader, but approximate the experience of listening to Marlon Brando mothball his way through *The Godfather*, and recall the brilliance of

Arseface in Garth Ennis's *Preacher*.

How Ewing manages to find the energy to keep returning to *2000AD*, the *Megazine*, and now this IDW series, while still keeping the stories fresh might be a wonder to some. For the writer, though, it's simple: "Dredd's my favourite comic character, so if I could, I'd write him forever. What keeps me away is commitments to other strips within *2000AD* and other comics outside it. But to me, Dredd remains one of the most fully-realised characters in fiction. You can literally tell any story in the world with him or around him. I don't know if you can say that about many other characters."



As well as the main character, we can expect to find yet more fan-favourites cropping-up later in the series. Both Ewing and McCrea were keen to point out the inclusion of Judge Anderson – the Psi-Division judge, who has been a long-standing cast member – quite how her psychic powers will work with those oversized Martian brains remains to be seen.

As for what we else can expect from later issues, Ewing noted that certain scenes were written specifically with McCrea in mind, "In issue two, there's a cavity search scene I might not have given to another artist. I don't know if John will see that as a compliment or not."

Mars Attacks Judge Dredd #1 will be available in September from IDW Publishing. The series features covers from Greg Staples, as well a variant by John McCrea and a subscriber-only cover set by Loston Wallace.

MARS ATTACKS JUDGE DREDD!
MARS ATTACKS JUDGE DREDD!
WRITTEN BY Al Ewing
ART BY John McCrea
COLORS BY Jay Fotos
LETTERS BY Tom B. Long
EDITS BY Bentley J. Tipton

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KIERON GILLEN INTERVIEW
by Gavin Lees

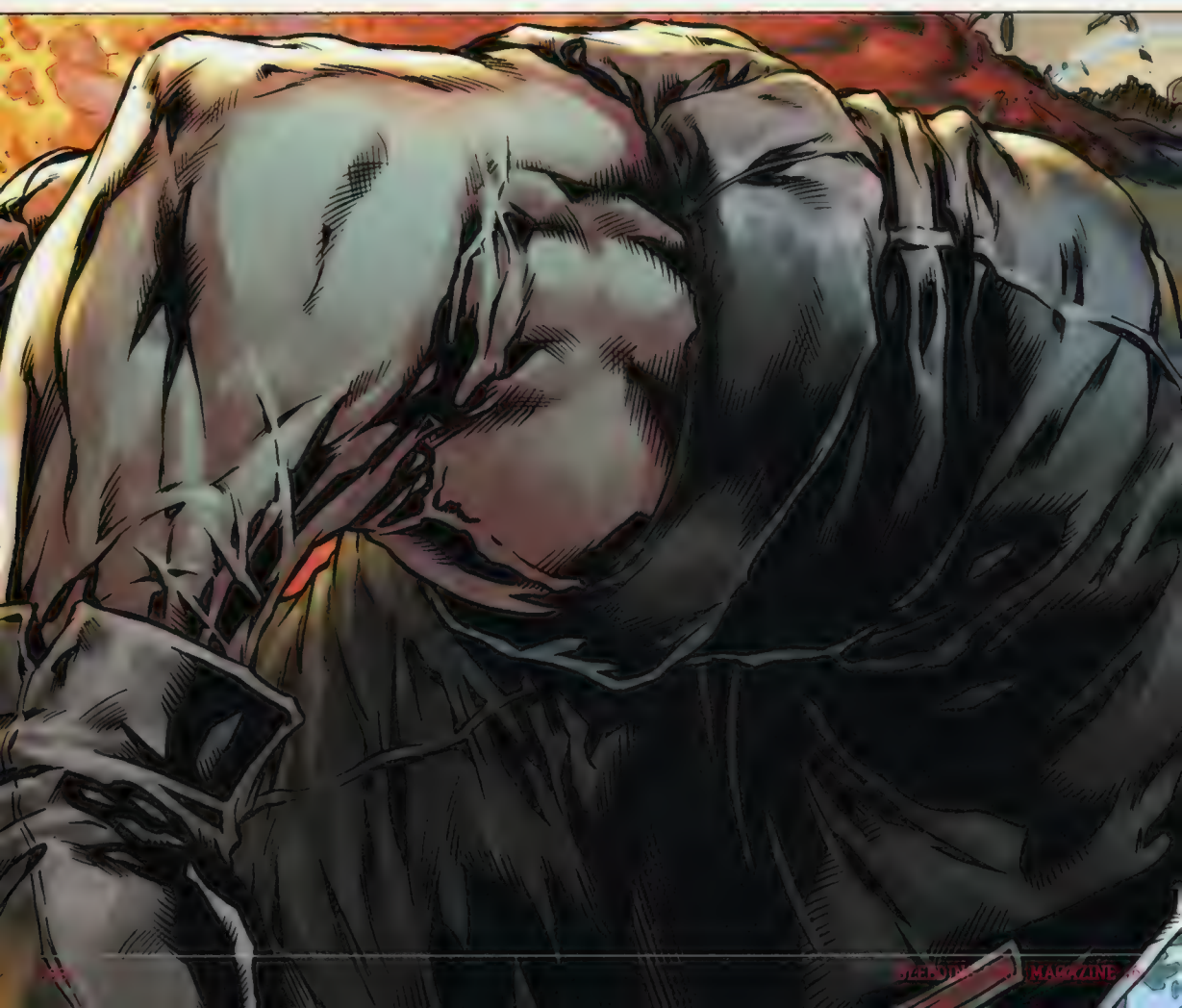
Over the last few years, Kieron Gillen has gone from being the well-respected indie writer behind the *Phonogram* series, to becoming one of the most consistently interesting mainstream writers behind several top monthly titles. His run on *Thor* spin-off, *Journey into Mystery*, has been hailed as a modern masterpiece, and often mentioned in the same breath as Neil Gaiman's Sandman. Recently, he has begun working on more personal titles, such as *Über* for Avatar Press, and the upcoming *Three* for Image Comics and *Mercury Heat*, also for Avatar.

I spoke to Gillen over telephone to discuss his work, his intense research process, and the ethics of writing about Nazi superheroes.

GL Let's start with talking about your latest project, which is *Über*. My understanding is that Avatar approached you to do the series, but you had some initial reservations. Can you talk about why you were initially reluctant?

KG This was way, way back in 2008, and William Christensen was talking to me about doing work. He had a couple of cool ideas of things he wanted developed into stories, and the idea he proposed to me was: World War II. Nazis invent superhumans, precipitating an armed race. Done in the Avatar style. No limits.

The core insight was that I would take it seriously, which no one else had really done. Instead of using it as its basic signifiers, where WWII is essentially a fantasy period. I thought I'd do something to work



against that trend; that tapped into the fact that WWII was an enormous event that still shapes the world today in a very real way, and I think it's important that we remember it.

It's a worthwhile subject, and it allows you to explore certain ideas about weaponisation, and power and responsibility, and all those areas. So, I went away and wrote this 25,000-word "bible" explaining the whole 60-issue series, at which point William realised that I was suitably less-sane than he thought I was, probably. [Laughter]

GL Even though you're moving away from the mythologisation of WWII, there is certainly a lot of mythology in *Über*. The Battleships' names are all drawn from Wagner and Germanic mythology, which gives it an air of fantasy. How do you reconcile that with a realistic approach to the conflict?

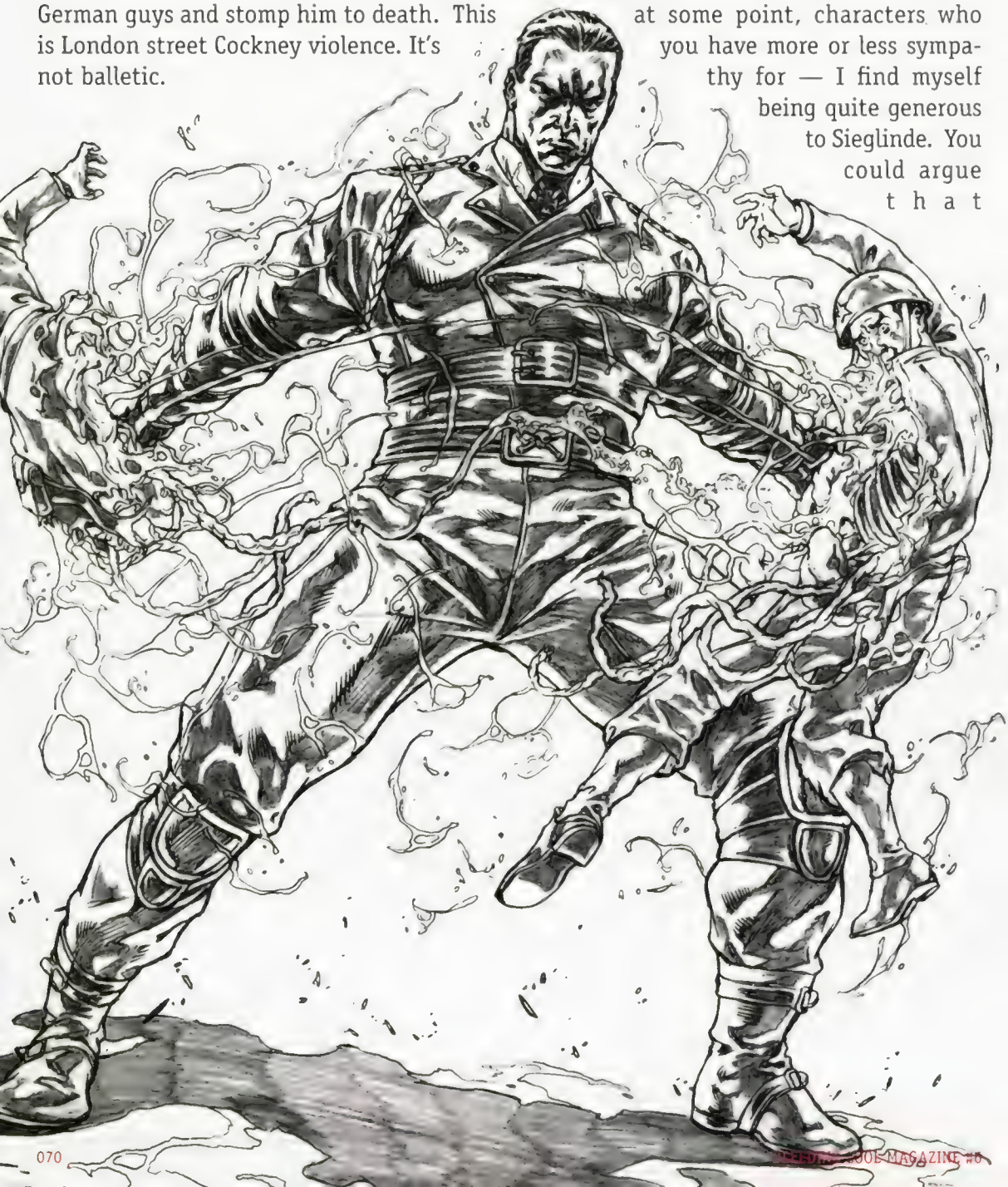
KG As soon as you've got people walking around, firing enormous molecular-distortion haloes out of their eyes, you're probably veering into the realm of fantasy. Part of me is playing the game where I was pretty sure that if Nazis had superheroes, they would name them after Wagner. The hard-on that Nazi Germany had for Wagner is difficult to understate. As well as calling the main übers Siegmund, Sieglinde, and Siegfried, there's also an element of the battle group Siegfried — so "Siegfried" is both Siegfried and his keepers. The most important part of the machine is the person and, militaristically speaking, all the people around them are in the same unit. This gets to the weaponisation of

people, and the abdication of responsibility.

I've tried to keep the superhero genre tropes to a minimum, but some of them always creep in. The first arc builds up to the first proper confrontation between Allied and German enhanced humans, which is the Battle of Paris. When they fight, it's not a superhero battle in the way it goes down. It's three British soldiers, who have been enhanced, who corner one of the German guys and stomp him to death. This is London street Cockney violence. It's not balletic.

GL In those first couple of issues, there's really no-one who stands out as an anchor for the reader. What was the thinking behind that?

KG I am aware of the fact that *Game of Thrones* is probably the closest thing in mainstream fiction to what I'm doing in *Über*. This is a story about factions going to war, and there might be, at some point, characters who you have more or less sympathy for — I find myself being quite generous to Sieglinde. You could argue that



Stephanie, because she's carrying the secrets back to the Allies, that makes her the de facto lead.

GL Yes, but when we first see her, she's carrying out experiments on prisoners.

KG Exactly — you don't know much about her. All you know is that she's basically self-hating, and understandably so. And she's our hero.

GL It seems like the übers are transformative technology, and with any military tech, there's also an economic aspect as well — the military-industrial complex — where there is an incentive to keep production going. Is that going to be factor that, rather than end the conflict like the Manhattan Project did, the übers are actually going to perpetuate it?

KG Yeah, you're entirely right. The story of *Über* is between 30 to 60 issues and that's a third act for WWII, but it ends with the peace — whatever that might look like in this conflict.

You also mentioned the Manhattan Project, and there is obviously a clock, which is set for when the real bombs dropped in the real world. By that point, America will have nuclear bombs, unless something else happens before then. I looked at Germany's position and thought that if you were going to put Germany in a more stable position — it was completely ruined at that point— what you would do with these resources.

GL WWII is living memory for some people, and it's very prevalent in our cultural history, but does *Über* have anything to say about contemporary wars?

KG There's certainly bits of it in there, but I think it's more about how people deal with horror and how it's about the fundamental cycle of violence — what pushes towards extremism and how they justify it, and by action, they become complicit in it. As a kid, the thing on everybody's syllabus was the causes for WWII, which is important for people to know. A lot of people's grandparents are dead now, and Nazis have become sanitised into the bad guys in a first-person shooter. That normalises them, and glamourises them because it makes them evil without any ethical element. So, the explicit problems of fascist situations and why people choose to turn to them — that's what I'd like people to take away from this — and, fundamentally, why it's wrong.

It's not about lessons, though, it's about showing a thing as how it was. By making it as vivid as possible, I hope that will be of some use for people today to have a recontextualisation of that period. It's not a history lesson, but it is quite historically dense. There's enough of the history in there for me to think that if this was people's first understanding of the period — in the same way I came to the Spartans through the David Gemmell books as a kid. There was enough of the actual in there to pique my interest, and at the absolute fucking worst, I would hope *Über* does that to somebody.

GL Probably the thing that readers were first exposed to you was through *Phonogram*. The voice in that series was completely different to how you write *Über*. It was far more personal, and many of the characters were cyphers for you. I don't know if you'd agree, but there's seem to be a certain extent that that's true with Loki as well — you had an empty vessel and you put yourself into this new, rejuvenated version. What's it like when you approach an established character like that — do you try to mould them in your own image to an extent?

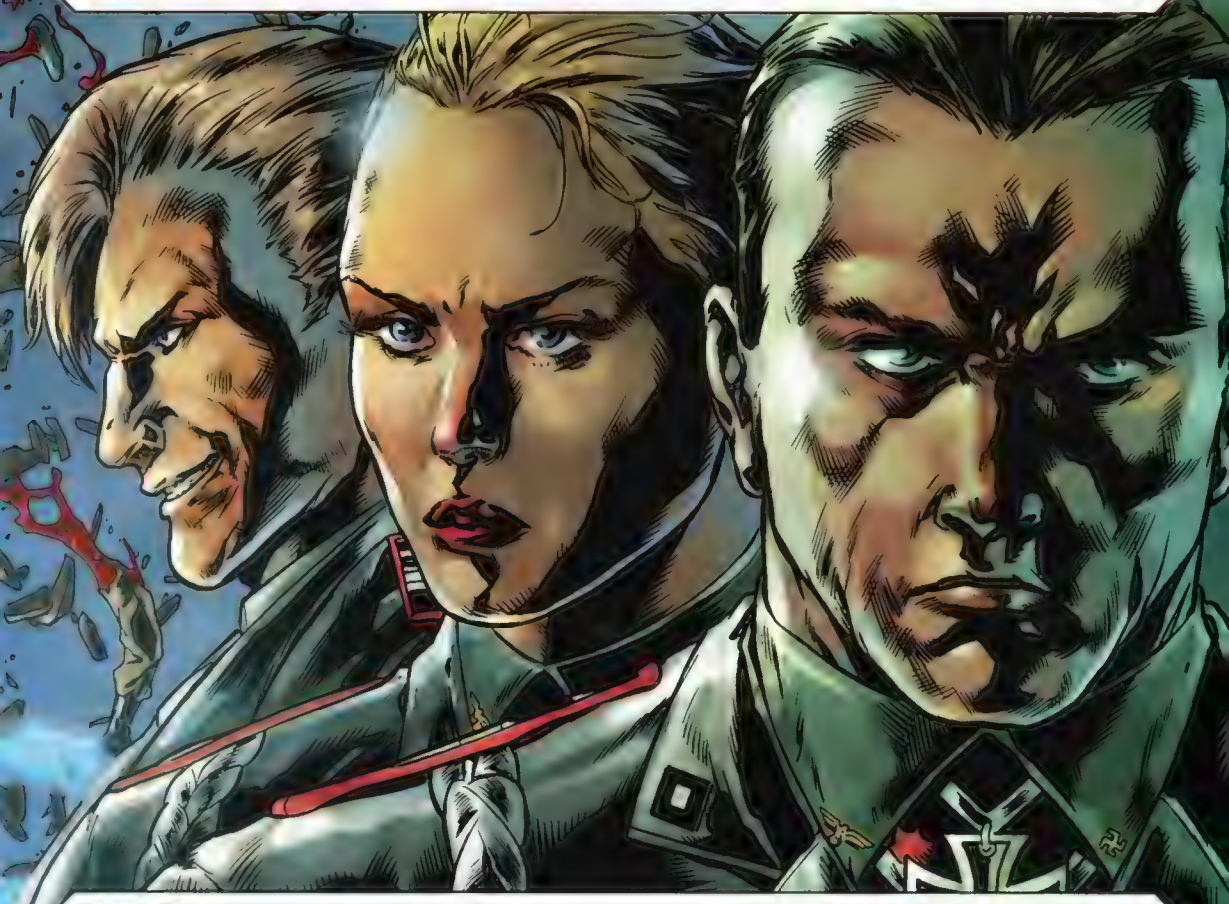
KG For me, a lot of it is looking at these established characters and finding what you find interesting and you deconstruct them. When I'm writing a character, I take them apart and think what they're actually about.

When you get someone like Loki, he's the Seth Bingo character if you think in a *Phonogram* way — Seth Bingo with a little bit of the ethics of other characters. He's a bad guy? If you look at a trend across my work, you'd find that my bad guys might be more interesting than my good guys, and the idea of Loki is that he allows me to write a bad guy as a hero. I don't know many heroes in my real world, but I know a lot of bad people — myself included! [Laughter] So, yeah, those are some of the ways in, as well as some of the basic questions that clearly obsess me, like whether people can change; talking as a weapon — Loki is a character who, in *Journey into Mystery*, never used a weapon once. I just think there's a very natural alignment between my sensibility and a character's sensibility. The idea of Kid Loki was Matt [Fraction]'s idea originally, but I kind of ran off with a Machiavellian Tin-Tin. [Laughter]

GL But you ask whether he can change or not, and one of the things that intrigues me is that — at the end of *Journey into Mystery*, the status quo is restored and adult Loki comes into a young body. Then, when we see him in *Young Avengers*, he's pretty much the same Kid Loki. Is this a comment on the physicality of heroes, that the body is a kind of locus of morality? That, because he's younger, he's inclined to be better.

KG Yeah, it's less the body of Kid Loki, but more the role of Kid Loki. The fact that adult Loki is in the role of a younger Loki means that his ways of interacting with the world are different, and he fights against it. He's certainly not good. He literally did steal all that power and was about to run off with it before he thought, "Oh no, I'm feeling guilty now." Loki was going to do it — in fact; he did it and then turned back. On the other hand, there's clearly other stuff going on. Yes, is the answer, I would say! I wanted to make it more interesting than just a creepy old man sitting in a kid's body.

GL That's interesting, because superheroes are in state of identity crisis. They've long done that metaphor of adolescence, where you're the physical master of you world, but socially, you're still beholden to your parents and you can't stay out late if they say you can't. I guess *Young Avengers* is doing that more overtly than other titles.



KG That was definitely our plan. You can certainly read Loki as a puberty metaphor. *Young Avengers* normally has about three or four metaphors churning away at the same time, and it relies on a fluidity in the reader to take what is meaning in each particular context, as well as being able to read the larger structure. Jamie [McKelvie, artist on *Young Avengers*] and I are trying to take the traditional superhero reading of teenage life and make it slightly more intense. There's a sense of distilling it down to almost like a musical, that it isn't real, and using that unreality as a way to talk about the world. This is using fairly unrealistic situations and highly-stylised characterisation to talk about highly-realistic issues. It's a complete inversion of what I was doing on *Generation Hope*, and I think it's more successful. We've loosened up a bit, and done it as pop music.

GL We've been talking a lot about writing, but that's only half the story of comics. When you started with *Phonogram*, obviously you'd quite a detailed level of collaboration with Jamie McKelvie, but what's your relationship been like with other artists?

KG You can't really generalise — it's about people. If you're doing a collaborative comic, it's about trying to form an axis which seems to work. The amount of actual hands-on-ness I would like depends entirely on the project. There are definitely some books I like leaving a little more room for the artist to take the reins of the visuals, because that's kind of how superhero comics of a certain style work. I don't think being too dictatorial in certain aspects really helps... and there's something like Journey into Mystery, where I do something a bit weird, or *Young Avengers*, where every page, me and Jamie are going back-and-forth over it.

GL Those double-page spreads in *Young Avengers* have become something of a signature of the comic. What's the thinking behind having an anchor scene like that in every issue?

KG They're pretty fucking cool, that's what they're for! [Laughter] This is just pop music, and we never try to sacrifice the beat, essentially — if you follow that awful metaphor. Specifically, in this case, we just wanted to step things up. Grant Morrison has been saying that we need to step away from the splash page, etc., etc. So, we just thought we'd try to work out another way that superhero comics could look in the 21st century. It's all very grounded, except when shit gets crazy, and then we go to something that makes it as fantastical as their powers are. That's kind of the idea.

GL You have some new titles coming out, including a couple of new projects for Avatar, one of which was announced years ago, which was *Mercury Heat*. What's the basic concept behind it?

KG It's quasi-hard science fiction. Mercury rotates in about 88 days — on the hot side, it'll melt lead; on the cold side, it freezes oxygen. However, it's so small, and turns so slowly, it means that there's a natural boundary where, for about a three-day period, is within what would count as Earth temperature. The other thing about Mercury being small is that it basically moves at 11 km/h or so, which is incredibly slow, and it means you can outrun the dawn. You just can't do it for long. The opening scene for the book is someone who's been dumped near the boundary on Mercury, with no hope of rescue, and is running away.

In the book, they're building The Belt, which is a ring around Mercury of solar panels, and you've got 50-or-so fortresses around it, which are the plugs and, at each one of these, the actual workforce are moved from plug to plug. It's kind of lived-in cyberpunk — Earth's a bit of a paradise, and this is where Utopia is paid for.

I wrote this at the time when Obama had just been elected, and I wanted to do a vaguely optimistic science fiction story, where some social problems we have now, have been solved and the world is much more environmentally friendly, but there's a whole load of separate problems. The subtext of *Mercury Heat* is: There will be a future, so we're going to have to fucking deal with it.

GL Who's the artist on the series?

KG It's Gabriel Andrade, who did work on *Ferals*.

GL Gabriel is one of these artists, much like Caanan on *Über*, who go for a very specific style of hyper-detail, and with very muscular, physical artwork, and that seems to really fit with the Avatar style. But you're also working on another project with Ryan Kelly — *Three* — and his approach to art is completely different. I would say it's perhaps softer, and more painterly.

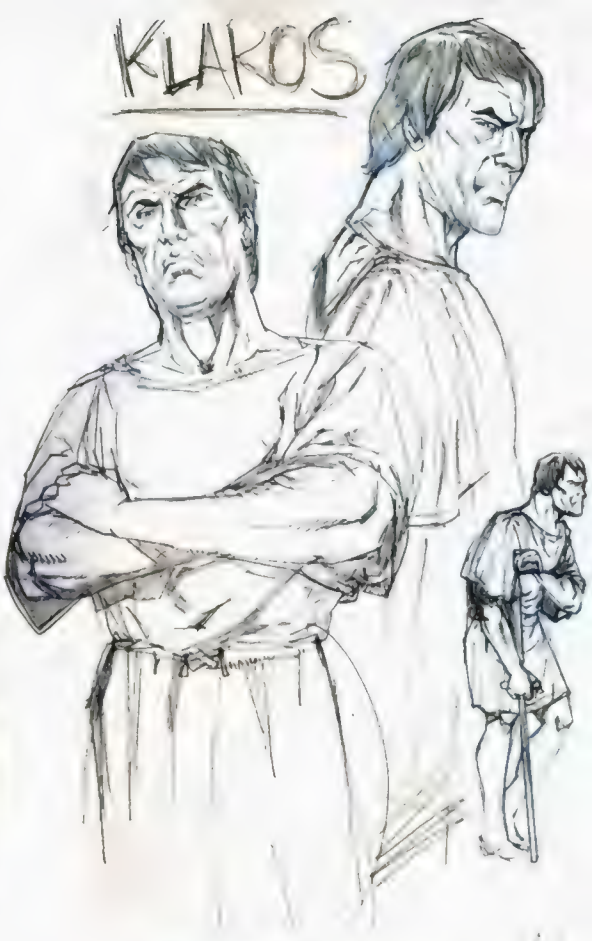
KG Au contraire! That series is set around the Sparta/Thebes war at the end of Sparta's dominion. If you've read the issues Ryan's done of *Northlanders* with Brian Wood, I love how he approaches people, that was what made me realise that he'd be perfect. While this is an action story, it's like a Billy Bragg folk song — this is a myth for people who never got myths made about them, because no-one ever did anything about the Helots ever. The only reason that Spartans were such amazing warriors in their prime was because they had 10 people doing all their work. You can't just hail the Spartan warrior without understanding the system that created the Spartan warrior. This is a story about exactly where the Spartan system got them. It's about context, and economics, and the forces of history essentially. It's weird — since I conceived it, it's only become ever more relevant with the class stuff going on at the moment — it's essentially a book about class warfare.

GL You've worked with Image; you've done books for Avatar which are sort of creator-led, and you've also done corporate-owned stuff for Marvel. Which method do you prefer?

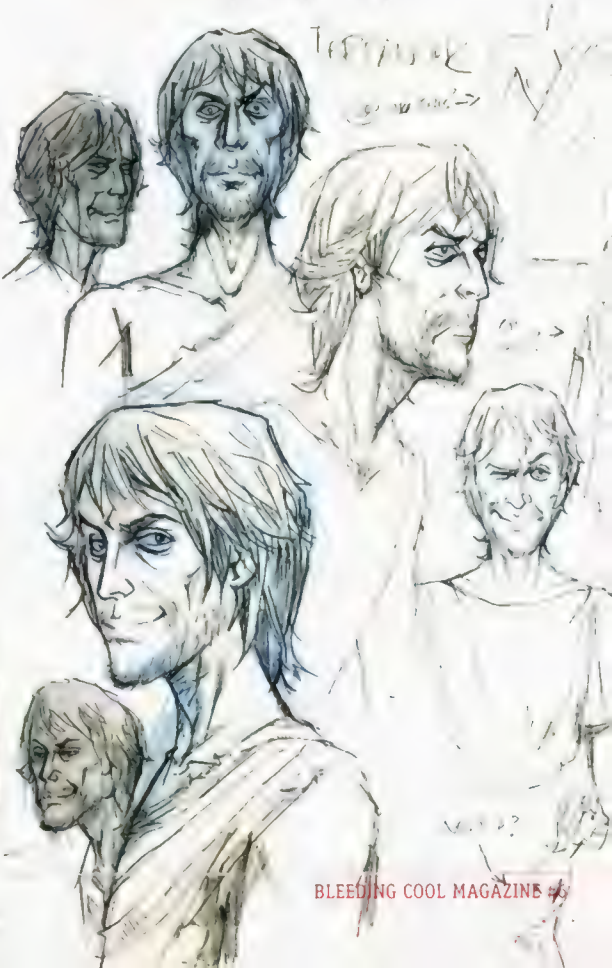
KG It's tricky, because I get bored enormously doing the same thing all the time. I couldn't do four books like *Phonogram* a month — that takes a certain amount out of you, both in organisation, and also certain level on bits of emotion that aren't necessarily comfortable to access. The more craft-based work has a puzzle-solving element to it that I quite enjoy. It's really the critic, rather than the journalist in me that sees the pieces and tries to rearrange them.

In the same way, it's like asking: do you like peas, fish, or chips? I kind of like them all, and I wouldn't want to just have one, I want them all together. God, I've got some awful metaphors today — the fish 'n' chips model of career writing. [Laughter] But, you know, I'm quite happy with how things are, and I think it's unlikely I'd ever go into just doing one thing. If I had to choose only one thing I've written, though, and set fire to everything else, I'd keep *The Singles Club*, but I couldn't just write *The Singles Club* forever.

RYAN KELLY is the artist working with Kieron Gillen on his next project, *Three*. The images in this spread are covers from the series: concept art, pencils, inks, and finals.



Character Sketches from Kieron Gillen's *Three*, drawn by Ryan Kelly.



SPARTA.
THREE
GILLEN KELLY BELLAIRE COWLES

BOOM! MEETS ARCHAIA

A Candid Interview With Matt Gagnon and Stephen Christy

BOOM! MEETS ARCHAIA
Matt Gagnon and Stephen Christy

STEPHEN CHRISTY: Matt, let's kick this off. You and I are about eight weeks in now post-acquisition. Things are starting to settle in here at the office. What's it been like on your end to see this new phase of growth for BOOM!, and how does this acquisition fit into the overall story of the company that you've helped grow for so long?

MATT GAGNON: It's been incredible. Archaia as a brand and an organization is so complementary and additive to what BOOM! does. It's a real force multiplier. But as with most things, what it actually comes down to are the people involved. You, [Marketing Manager] Mel [Caylo], [Editor Rebecca] Tay [Taylor], [Production Manager] Scott [Newman], and all the Archaia folks are terrific. Between all of you and the people here at BOOM! there are already many friendships that go back years. So, from an integration standpoint it felt completely natural from day one.

Adding more great content, great people, and a strong brand is something that helps us on our mission of building a progressive, next-gen comic book company that reflects the real world and what the industry needs moving forward.

Let's turn the tables: As the individual who is responsible for much of Archaia's brand and success, what has this experience been like for you?

CHRISTY It's been like walking into an entirely different world. Before I came over here I'd known you, [VP of Marketing and Publishing] Filip [Sablik], and [CEO and Founder] Ross [Richie] for a few years, and even though we were competitors, I always had a huge amount of respect for all of you guys and the business that you were building over at BOOM!. At Archaia, the thing I knew our team could always, always deliver on was creating a beautiful-looking book.

In the eight weeks since the acquisition, I've just been so happy and grateful to see how much you and the entire BOOM!

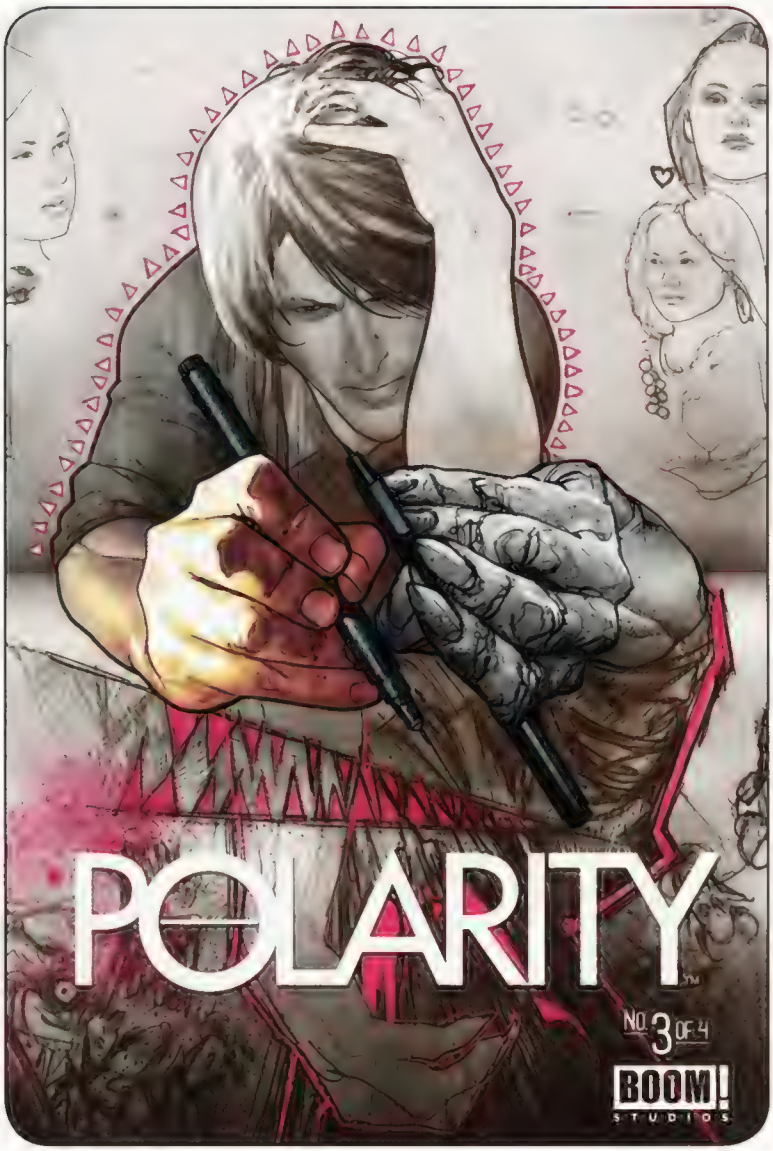
team have not only welcomed Archaia with open arms, but have been so encouraging and additive to the ethos of Archaia's approach to books. For instance, the Henson project that you and I have been talking about for the last week is something that is just going to be the most groundbreaking book of 2015, and it's something that we NEVER could have done pre-acquisition. Beyond that, everyone at BOOM! is just so amazing and kind. I think you can see it in the office—all of the Archaia people are so happy to be here and so excited to collaborate on new things. There's a sense of family and camaraderie at BOOM! that is rare to see in the comics industry. It makes me feel like we can accomplish great things together.

So, speaking of groundbreaking projects like the Henson thing we've been talking about, what do you think Archaia needs to do from a brand and production standpoint in order to build on what the company has already accomplished? What can Archaia do to remain the best home for groundbreaking production in the comics industry?

GAGNON The Henson project is going to be seismic. I'm really excited about that.

Truthfully, Archaia just needs to keep doing what it's doing from a creative standpoint. The books that Archaia publishes are beautiful and they've only gotten better over the years. I feel like things reached all new heights with *Tale of Sand*, and *The Joyners in 3D* is going to be its successor in terms of breaking new ground. That sensibility of trying to push the envelope, every year, to present a story in a way that nobody has ever seen before—that's the Archaia spirit I'm excited about continuing. That honors the brand.

On the BOOM! end, we've been committed to telling new stories—creating original comics—which is obviously a difficult task. We went on a run this year that I'm really proud of: *Polarity, Suicide Risk, Next Testament, Six-Gun Gorilla, Day Men, 3 Guns,* and *Hit*, which spans April to September. And we



have more that are coming up. As a fellow publisher of original comics, what role do you think our new, combined entity plays in the current comic book market?

CHRISTY

That's a great question. I said this when the acquisition happened, but I think the real power behind this new entity is that we have an all-star roster of comic book folks at our company. Literally, from the top down you have a group of people who are kicking ass at what they do, and I think it's a testament to what you've done in building one of the most effective editorial teams in comics.

My hope is that between all of the imprints, we can creatively offer something for every comic book fan out there. The thing I used to say over and over at Archaia was, "Comics for people who don't read comics." That was a big part of the Archaia brand, that we made beautiful-looking books to people who had never read comic books before and they could get into it and appreciate the artist expression behind it. Factor in the rolling thunder of the original BOOM! Studios comics that you just named, and you have a whole line of original books that anyone who grew up loving Vertigo or loves Image right now can fall in love with. Then with KaBOOM!, you have the entire all-ages market on lockdown. Factor in what we've been talking about in terms of the BOOM! Town imprint, and I think you literally have something for every reader out there.

I think you and I at the end of the day share the same goal of being evangelical about comic books bringing more people into the market with amazing content. And I believe we have a slate that reflects that goal.

Matt what's a dream project for you? Seriously, you and I have been so lucky that we've already accomplished great things and made dream projects. But what keeps you up at night? What have you not accomplished yet in comics personally that you're reaching for? I want to know what your ultimate project is.

20 years from now. And we're doing that. We have a huge opportunity right now. That means working with people from all walks of life and creating a corporate culture that reflects modern times. Working with people who are the best at what they do and actually care about their work is critical. We're very fortunate in that sense. I want to produce work and operate a company that speaks to the world as it is right now, as opposed to what it used to be.

All right, I'm volleying this question back to you!

CHRISTY

Dream project! Well, I live for doing things that have never been done before. Taking people and pushing them beyond what they thought possible. I love being on the phone talking with printers and hear them say, "But that's never been done before!" To which my response is, "That's why we have to do it." This year we did *Cyborg 009* and right now I'm literally finishing out *The Joyners in 3D*, which is Archaia's tentpole book for the Fall.

For *The Joyners in 3D*, we're literally creating an entirely new printing process in order to make the 3D work in that book. Forget CMYK printing—there's a chain of emails 50 deep in my inbox about mixing pantone colors in order to create new cyan and magenta colors to create the perfect, artifact-free, red-and-blue 3D on paper. That's the kind of stuff I live for and that

GAGNON

Man, that's a tough one. In a general sense, I want to put stories out into the world that are lasting and meaningful. What keeps me up at night? What gets me up in the morning? I want to leave the industry better than I found it. Those two things in particular really drive me. I've said before that I'm trying to build a comic book company now that looks like what a comic book company will look like

no other imprint but Archaia could pull off. And we did the same thing on *CYBORG 009*, making the world's first four-layer cover using an acetate plastic dust jacket and two layers of vellum. As you can see, I'm a major printing geek, and having the opportunity to make books like these is what I'm really grateful for.

But after making comics for so many years I'm so grateful for the chance to expand and really focus on the film and TV side. Archaia has had so much success selling our properties in film and TV over the last two years, but I've never had the opportunity to focus on that side of the business, so I'm excited to go kick some ass in that arena. Also, I got my start in film and TV producing feature-length documentaries. One day I'd love to get back to that. There are two documentaries kicking around in my head that I'd love the opportunity to produce.

Close it out, man. Where are we both five years from now?

GAGNON

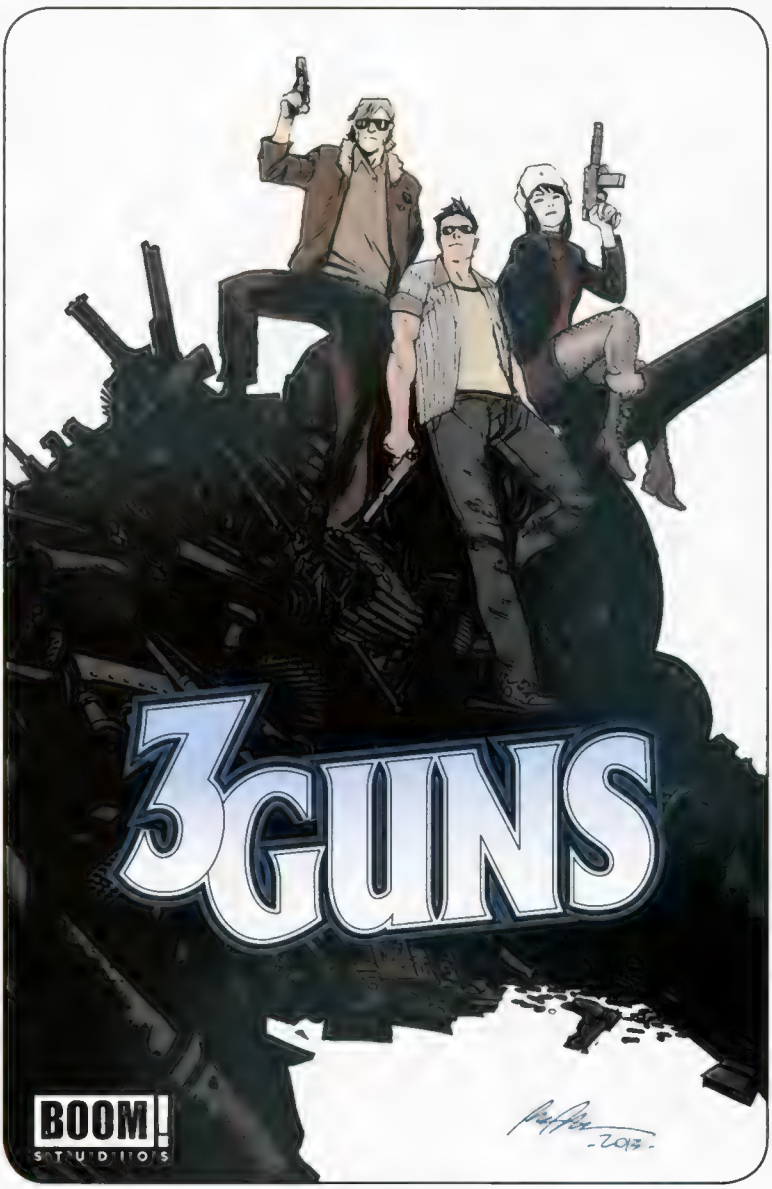
Wherever we are, we have a few more gray hairs and a few more crow's feet!

In all seriousness, I think we're still at the top of our game five years from now, telling great stories and doing our part to help the industry more forward. It's crazy, I feel like we're just getting started. The difference I've seen in the comic book industry just from 2011 to 2013 is massive. Sales are up, the quality of content is stellar, public perception is terrific, and series like *The Walking Dead* and *Adventure Time* are bringing more new readers to the industry than we've seen in years. I don't think we could be positioned much better, collectively, to take this industry to brand new heights.

For our part, I believe we can help lead the way.

CHRISTY

Couldn't agree more. It's an honor to be a part of the team and I'm excited to see where we can go together!



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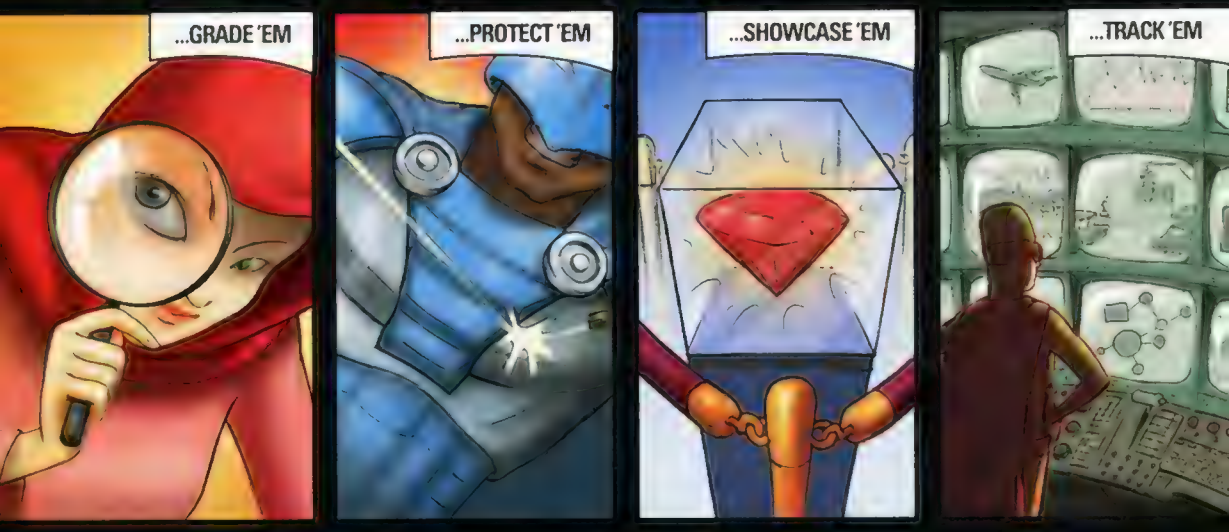

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IRON MAN 3 SPECIAL FEATURES

by Brendon Connelly

We're past the golden era of DVD and Blu-ray sales, and this means we're on a downhill slope when it comes to special features. These days, the multi-hour documentary is an increasingly rare treat. But it is possible to pack a lot of punch into shorter featurettes and just a single commentary. I think Marvel's *Iron Man 3* disc can stand as a pretty good example of how a smaller suite of special features might still afford plenty of rewards for the interested viewer.

It didn't take me long to learn that it's all too obvious why most Deleted Scenes became deleted, but it is still true that the best can allow us some kind of insight into the shaping of a film's story. There's certainly a few ways the additional clips on *Iron Man 3* do this.

First of all, there are some full versions of faux TV show scenes we see clipped very briefly in the film. In these extended edits, Bill Maher gets a lot more jokes and *E! Fashion Police* is revealed to have a full house of presenters with Giuliana Rancic and Kelly Osbourne scrabbled back up from the cutting room floor. Full sequences were scripted and shot, but the material was then sculpted way, way down in the editing room – a technique that was obviously more effective than it was efficient, but a plan that rightly prioritised the end result ahead of the process.

Some of the other deleted scenes play like the Line-O-Rama features from Judd Apatow discs, offering different variations on a single line or gag, all of them apparently improvised. *Iron Man 3* gives us a great - but massively spoilery - example of this with Don Cheadle and Ben Kingsley riffing away. Kingsley proves again and again that there was really nobody better for his tricky role, all in just a couple of minutes of discarded improv.

There are also a few references to other members of the Marvel Universe in the deleted scenes - nothing meaningful, but tossed-aside name-drops for Thor, The Hulk, and Captain America. I'm glad they're gone, afraid that they would probably play like hollow fan service in the movie proper.

And then the most extensive of the

deletions is a complete, excised subplot, a few scenes that introduced a bully antagonist for Tony Stark's kid cohort Harley, and then played out his - admittedly brief and lightly-drawn - story in full. There was a novel use for the arc reactor here, but I can understand why the character, and therefore all of these beats, are gone.

Also included are a handful of mini-documentaries, and though they don't add up to anything more than one short TV special between them, there's still some great material. A good chunk focuses on deconstructing the stunt work in the Air Force One rescue section of the film, and it was fun and illuminating to see the surprisingly practical, in-camera tricks employed in filming this sequence.

There's a good amount of trivia piled up in these little featurettes, as well as Marvel going to great pains to underline some key ideas. Remember the big Hulkbuster armor from the movie? Well, no, you don't. That's not Hulkbuster armor. Producer Victoria Alonso makes it very clear that Tony Stark's bulky Igor Suit should not be misidentified. Why? Well, I'm not sure why it's so important, but it obviously is.

And this is something Shane Black and Drew Pearce highlight in their commentary, too. You won't get through this disc without knowing, for sure, that there's no Hulkbuster armour yet and Marvel wants you to stop assuming there is.

Black and Pearce's commentary is the highlight of the disc, and the real reason I loved it. There are a few gaps, but when the guys are talking, they're talking. It's obvious, but they have chemistry now. Black is pretty frank - and funny - about his initial introduction to Pearce, when Marvel stuck them together cold and told them they'd be collaborating. It almost went very wrong, and though I'd heard this story from Black in person, his telling of it on the disc is still funny and awkward and convincing.

Indeed, frank and funny would pretty much be the bywords for this commentary, with Black not afraid to criticise the film or point out any errors or shortcomings, and

Pearce managing to be quite self-deprecating at times. But they both also point out some of the less obvious, smaller but still important things they certainly got right, and the lengths they went to in order to nail them.

For example, Black reveals how one shot in the film features a CG Dora the Explorer watch. Why? Because it dots the i's and crosses the t's in one of the film's emotional arcs, but nobody thought of it until after the scene had been shot. They could have just let it go, but they wanted the shot to have as much impact as impossible.

Aside from directly *Iron Man 3*-relevent supplements, the disc also features some business from other corners of the Marvel Movieverse. There's a two minute promo for *Thor: The Dark World*, built out of clips from the first teaser trailer and some puffy talking head pieces. Unfortunately, that's pretty weak and badly timed - we've seen a lot more of the film already.

And then there's the *Marvel One Shot: Peggy Carter* short film. I've talked about this film at length on Bleeding Cool's website, but the short version is this: if I had a thirteen year old daughter, this might well be her favourite film. By the time she was seventeen or eighteen, though? She would probably - or at least hopefully - be looking for something with more substance. P*eggy Carter* is fun, but for me, I think it's very much a one-and-I'm-done short.

So, the *Iron Man 3* disc doesn't come so fully loaded you need to take a day off just to enjoy it - let alone the weekend I put aside for *The Two Towers*, say, or the week I spent swimming in *The Alien Anthology*. I'd have liked another commentary track, perhaps, and there could easily have been another hour's worth of interesting featurette material. And Agent Carter was left out in the cold too, with no supplements at all.

But what there is, thanks in no small part to the company of Shane Black and Drew Pearce and the surprising amount of candor on display, made for an absorbing few hours.

Iron Man 3 is available on DVD, Blu-ray, and Blu-ray 3D now.

TRISH OUT OF WATER

An Interview with Vince Hernandez

by Dan Wickline

Aspen MLT, a comic book publisher founded in January of 2003 has reached its ten year anniversary and with it they are launching a new series, *Trish Out Of Water*. This new series written by the company's Editor-in-Chief Vince Hernandez, is about a teen-aged girl trying to cope with the discovery of her special abilities while navigating the trials of high school. I sat down with Vince and talked about the new series, artist Giuseppe Cafaro, and where he sees the company after its first decade.

As part of Aspen's 10 for 10 celebration, you are launching a new title: *Trish Out Of Water*. What was the inspiration for the new series? With a name that is so specific to the concept, did you come up with it first or did it come up later and if so how?

The title came after the concept. I knew I wanted to do this series about a young, high school girl whose body was both figuratively and literally changing before her eyes. At the outset of this tale she begins to experience these dramatic shifts in her form and so once I nailed down that basic concept, the title was easy. In the back of my mind, I always had the title in mind to use and once the idea grew, I knew it was the perfect match.

At first glance, Trish doesn't look like she belongs in the same universe as some of your other characters, yet her story is tied to the title that started the company. How does Trish fit into the Aspen Universe and what are some of the ties to Michael Turner's *Fathom*?

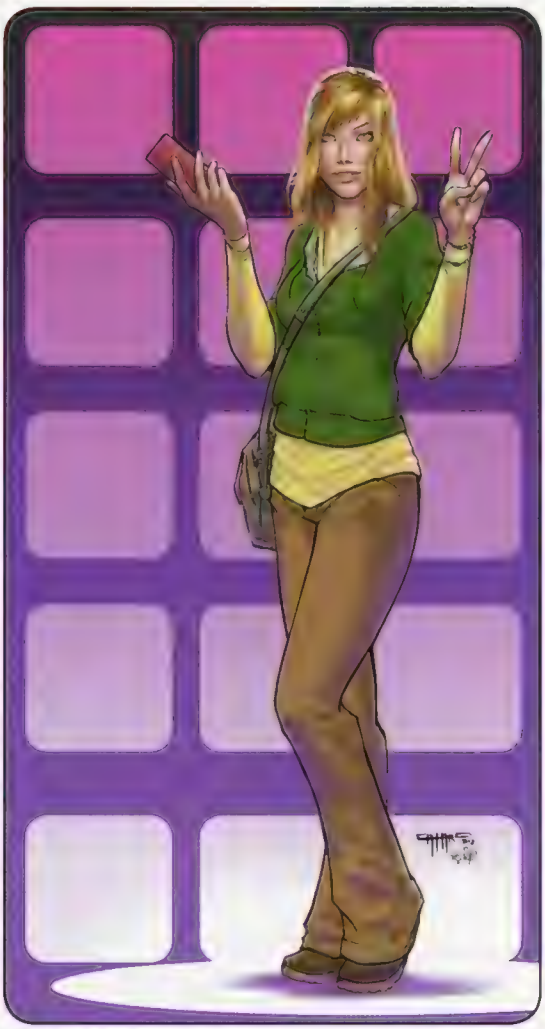
We wanted to try something different but yet also familiar when it came to the universe that Trish exists in. I felt like fans of Fathom know what they like, but there's an entire generation of readers that didn't grow up with Fathom, and so I wanted to offer a different spin on a familiar footing. That's how Trish's story ended up existing in the Fathom Universe. That doesn't mean there will be an interaction between the Fathom and Trish characters, but there will be a backdrop that exists thanks to Fathom. This is a world where there is another race of beings that are known to live under the surface. I felt that was a fascinating landscape to use for Trish's story. The characters in *Trish* live and interact in this world where the fantastical has been revealed, so I'll be exploring the normal human reaction to something like that.

Taking a look at Trish specifically, who is she as a character when we first meet her? How does what she believes to be true set her up for the changes coming and why is she just dressed like a normal teenager instead of in some cosplay-ready costume?

She is a normal teenager for sure, and we want to reflect that in her design and clothing. Of course, there's always a time and place for the more amazing costume designs in titles, but I felt that this story was not about that. I really want Trish to be relatable to a wider audience, and with that comes her more natural clothing choices. In our story she is a regular adolescent until she begins to develop these strange abilities, but that won't change who she is as a person in terms of her personality or apparel.

From reading the solicitations and the title, the book seems to have a fish-out-of-water / coming-of-age theme to it. How would you describe the overall theme of the series and where do you see the series going as the story progresses?

You hit the nail on the head, it most definitely is a coming-of-age story with a bit of the supernatural thrown in once the story really gets going. As the story progresses, we begin to unwrap the layers to her journey and I'm excited because the ending really turns the story on its side. This certainly isn't *Saved by the Bell* or *Veronica Mars* in the sense that we're just focused on her everyday high school doings, as the story unfolds we will begin to really paint a larger picture and readers will be able to see just how grand the scope of this story is. There is one particular moment toward the end that will hopefully have readers excited for the future of the series.



You are working with Giuseppe Cafaro on this project. In the past he's penciled a few books for Aspen, what made him the right choice for *Trish Out Of Water*? How does the collaboration process with him work?

Our collaboration process is precisely what drew me to his art for the project. Giuseppe easily gets everything I try to accomplish as a writer and in the story. So, once I knew what the story was, the decision was easy to bring Giuseppe into the fold. Not only that, but has really shown great care and attention in making Trish not only someone that people can relate to, but also love. Little things like clothing and jewelry choices that he has created have given Trish life that I could never have done.

As the Editor-in-Chief for Aspen, how difficult is it to put that job aside long enough to get your scripts done? Do you feel that wearing both hats puts any added pressure on you to produce the highest quality work? How often does Editor Vince have to yell at Writer Vince about deadlines?

Haha, no thankfully Writer Vince rarely misses deadlines so Editor Vince is generally happy. But, yes, I do feel an added pressure because I want to make sure that I'm telling the best possible story for whatever series I'm currently writing. Mostly, however, the pressure comes on the editorial side as that is inherently more difficult than writing stories, in my opinion. Luckily, I have a pretty good system in place after nearly eight years of writing comics. I spend the majority of my day with my editor cap on, then during the night I go home and turn into the writer. It seems to have worked well so far, knock on wood.

This is the 10th anniversary of Aspen Comics, besides this new series, what other special events can fans look forward to? Are there any big surprises lined up?

Since the "10 for 10" initiative we started in February was such a huge success for us, we're planning a similar initiative next year as well. The "10 for 10" was focused on new directions, and bringing our brand to a wider audience and this year's event will do the same, and then some.

It's been five years since the untimely passing of Michael Turner. On the handful of occasions that I got talk with him I was always blown away by his kindness and his talent. I also got the sense he had a vision for what he was doing with Aspen. Now you and the folks at Aspen are carrying that torch forward for him. At the end of your first decade, how do you feel the company is doing along that path and where do you see it expanding in the future?

I'm highly critical as a person and always assume we can do better, but of course I'm very proud and satisfied with where we're at, at this point. Ten years is a long time but we're still young as a company and we hit some very exciting milestones this year such as holding onto the top small press book of each month for over half a year and counting, as well as our entry into the top ten of Diamond's market share as a publisher. These are legitimate signs of success which is great, but like our founder Michael Turner, we don't plan to rest at all. Our plans for the next ten years are exciting and we look forward to hopefully doing what we do best—creating entertaining comics.

Trish Out Of Water comes out in October 2013 and the first issue, like all the other 10 for 10 titles, will be available for only $1. With this being the penultimate release of the anniversary event, we can start looking towards year eleven for Aspen and with Vince's promise of more events, I think the company has many great years ahead of them.

VINTAGE PAPER CHASE

by Mark Seifert & William Christensen

KEEP YOUR HANDS ON THE BAR, MAGGOT, 'LESS YOU WANT THIS IN YOUR GUT!
BUT JUST TO SET YOUR MIND AT EASE, I'M NOT LOOKING TO COLLECT THE BOUNTY ON YOU!

San Diego Comic Con is several weeks behind us now, and while many people justifiably believe the show's days as a purely comic-centric event are long past, its power in shaping the vintage comics market is just now coming into its prime.

Let's call this the Hall H Effect: the impact on the vintage comics back issue market when comic-related movie developments are announced in the con's now-famous Hall H in front of a frenzied audience of the most hardcore comic book fans imaginable.

We saw the results of the Hall H Effect last year on various *Guardians of the Galaxy*-related comics from *Tales to Astonish #13* to *Marvel Preview #7*, and the phenomenon has become even more pronounced in 2013.

Golden Age

Warner Bros announced a *Superman/Batman* movie in Hall H this year, and this event marks one of the few times that a movie announcement has moved the market on specific Golden Age back issues. Movie announcements create heat in the Silver Age all the time, based on which characters are appearing in what movies, but the impact of such things on the Golden Age market is usually much more generalized -- yes, the *Man of Steel* film helped sustain interest in *Action Comics #1*, but so do the million other ongoing factors that have served to make Superman a global icon and *Action Comics #1* the world's most valuable comic.

SUPERMAN
DOUBLE-FEATURE!
BATMAN, THE WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE, JOINS FORCES WITH THE MAN OF STEEL TO BECOME...
"The MIGHTIEST TEAM ON EARTH!"
LOOK IN PANGBE! THIS IS A JOB FOR SUPERMAN!
NO, THIS IS A JOB FOR BATMAN!

Superman/Batman has created a far more localized effect that also gets to the heart of some of the reasons that people collect old comics – history and context. Superman and Batman have a rich history of adventuring together, and it started in the Golden Age. Much of the collector focus here is on *Superman #76* – a stand-out tale in which Batman crosses over into the Superman title and the characters learn each other's identities – but don't overlook the earlier *All-Star Comics #36*, an earlier team-up with Superman and Batman taking part in a Justice Society of America adventure.

These are both still pretty affordable

books by Golden Age standards, with recent raw sales including *Superman #76* F- $650, G/VG $350, and *All-Star #36* VG $350, F/VF $1250.

Silver Age

The recent explosion of *Avengers #55* is a textbook case of the new Hall H Effect. Sales on this comic, which is Ultron's first appearance, took off virtually overnight after Marvel announced that the *Avengers* film sequel would be titled *Age of Ultron*. This comic that could be had at $25 or less for raw copies on ebay just 3-4 months ago, but more recent prices include *Avengers #55* CGC 9.8 $3522, CGC 9.6 $2400, and CGC 8.0 $411, with high grade raw copies going in the $400 range. The market on this book is so heated right now it's impossible to say where prices might stabilize. If you want one in the short term, it might be best to shop around for a nice raw copy.

Back on the DC side of the aisle, *World's Finest #71* is another book benefitting from that *Superman/Batman* movie announcement. This has been an underappreciated key for decades (amazingly, Superman and Batman had separate stories in the *World's Finest* title before finally teaming up in the series starting in this issue) that many are now rediscovering. With recent sales including raw VG $450 and CGC 6.0 $750, this book is probably still a bargain, and if you're lucky enough to see a high grade copy, jump on it – there's only one copy above CGC 7.5 on the CGC census.

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WORLD'S FINEST COMICS
Featuring YOUR TWO FAVORITE HEROES TOGETHER in one adventure!
In this issue: READ WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SUPERMAN AND BATMAN EXCHANGE IDENTITIES!

Bronze Age

Though *Guardians of the Galaxy*-related keys have been hot since last year's San Diego Comic Con, this year's Hall H presentation with the cast and an early clip of the film has kept all of those comics on the front burner – and turned up the heat on a few. The first appearance of Gamora in *Strange Tales #180* is one of the big winners here, as the character appears ready for her star turn as played by Zoe Saldana in the film. Recent prices include CGC 9.8 $450, and CGC 9.4 $293.

We'll close out by noting the rather eye-popping recent sale of an *Iron Man #55* CGC 9.8 for $13,025. This comic is the first appearance of Thanos and Drax the Destroyer, and when we called it out in *Bleeding Cool Magazine #1* last year, we noted that CGC 9.8 copies could be had for $3000-3500 at the time.

The Future Of Vintage Paper

Do you know of any vintage comic sales of note? Are you an experienced dealer or collector who wants to contribute info? Let us know at: *vintage-paper@bleedingcool.com*.

FIVE HOT COMICS, AND FIVE THAT MIGHT BE

by Rich Johnston

The rule for hot comics of late has been about one-in-three Image Comics titles will see the first issue rocket in price. And that's basically all a speculator has needed to know. Shops tell me of speculators who come in and just wipe them out of any issue ones on the first day of sale. That also is how the Image Comics titles keep selling out instantly, despite being mostly returnable based on retailer sales.

But this year we've seen this behaviour begin to apply to other publishers as well. Not Marvel and DC, but the likes of Dark Horse, Avatar, Boom, IDW, Oni, and more.

HOT COMICS

TODD THE UGLIEST KID ON EARTH #1

This was a hot book when it first came out from Image Comics earlier in the year. Then it cooled. And then it got picked up as a potential TV series. A CGC 9.8 rated copy goes for around $90 on eBay and a raw ungraded copy can still pick up to $60.

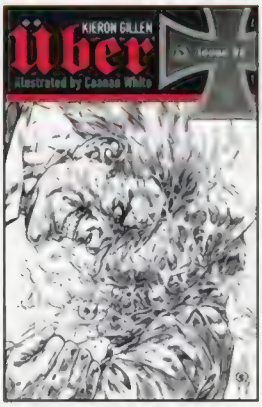
RACHEL RISING #1

Again, a modest book from a self-publisher, with a dedicated fan base from previous work and a TV option on this title by Terry Moore has done the trick. An ungraded comic can generate up to $130 on eBay, but a CGC 9.8 could see you score $400. And yet there are bound to be unnoticed copies in people's long boxes up and down the nation.

MIND MGMT #1

The comic that made people sit up and notice Matt Kindt writing and drawing is still continuing, despite his other work for Marvel and DC. And it is as hot as they come. Issue 1 variant 9.8 CGC gets $280 without a sweat, while a raw standard cover is $50 easily. The 0 reprint of online strips is a relative bargain at up to $12 raw.

UBER #0 AND #1



Uber – is the "what if the Nazis invented superheroes at the end of World War II" comic by Kieron Gillen and Canaan White. Bleeding Cool's publisher, Avatar Press, deliberately hasn't published second prints of the sell-out issues, instead publishing an "enhanced" version with more content for an extra dollar. As a result, sales have been high and interest has remained. As an Avatar book, there are plenty of covers with intentionally rarer covers increasing their prices. But even the standard #0 covers fetch $20 on eBay, raw, with #1 getting $25, but a CGC 9.9 Blitzkrieg sketch variant of #1 is hitting $150.

HAWKEYE #1

It is so rare these days for a Marvel or DC comic to get so hot, so quickly, as most retailers have worked out how to order enough of them. However, *Hawkeye* took everyone by surprise. The Adi Granov variant of #1 CGC 9.8 sells for over $110, a standard raw copy can still sell for over $40.

ONES TO WATCH

27 #1

It was a book I picked on BleedingCool.com ages ago, and for a time it was a minor hot book, before fading back into the mass of Image issue ones that didn't become super-hot. But since then, creator Charles Soule has gone on to strength. He's currently writing seven monthly books, for Marvel, DC, and Oni, and one of them is *Superman/Wonder Woman*. Like Matt Kindt, he's putting in the work, getting assignments, and increasing his profile. At some point people will look back to *27* to see where it all started. Also keep an eye on *Surrogates* from Top Shelf and *Pinnocchio The Vampire Slayer* for similar reasons.

AVENGERS #257

Karen Gillan is hot. And even when she's bald, she's hot. And she's bald to play Nebula in *Guardians Of The Galaxy*. And this is Nebula's first appearance. Recently it was a dollar comic, if that, now it is a $15 comic. I don't think it's anywhere near to reaching its ceiling.

MYSTERIOUS STRANGERS #1

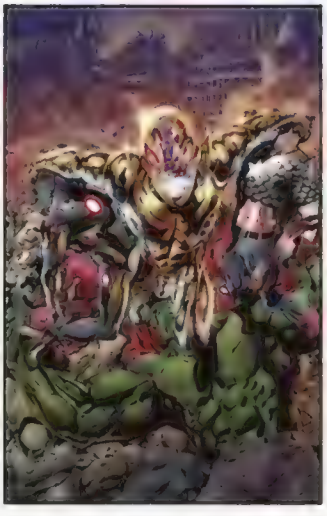
Both #1 and #2 of the new Chris Roberson series for Oni, that received strong Free Comic Book Day promotion, will be double shipped to stores, so they will receive twice as many as ordered. But some stores will have ordered none. The double ship may increase the profile of the book on the stand, but will also increase the discrepancy between the haves and have nots. Your store may also be able to give you a good deal on the comic... even as some areas will have no issues at all.

SUPERMAN/BATMAN #1

There's a film on the way with this very title. And with the new *Batman/Superman* book out, the previous revival of *Superman/Batman* by Jeph Loeb and Ed Guinness is already at around $13. Something tells me that could be going up very shortly.

AGE OF ULTRON #1

It was Jay of Jay's Company who pointed out that even though this was selling for a dollar on eBay a few months ago, he could sell copies for $10-$15 at shows. Not after the San Diego announcement, though. The second Avengers film, *Avengers Age Of Ultron*, will have nothing to do with the comic, but the title is what matters. A CGC 9.8 of the Bryan Hitch variant will set you back $170 on eBay, but a raw standard cover can go for $5 max online. It did have a big print run with heavy incentive levels for shops to order more than they could sell. So you should be able to find it in some dollar boxes at local shops without too much difficulty. But by the time the movie comes out, that could well change.



PRICE GUIDE

for Collectors and Sellers

Welcome to the Bleeding Cool Price Guide. This is a snippet of the kind of prices comics are selling for on the open market. Rich Johnston scoured the web and thousands of online auction listings to provide this snapshot of comic book sales. A price listed here is no guarantee you'll be able to sell yours for that price, but it might give you an idea of what someone, somewhere, is willing to pay! Retailers who would like to become part of an advisory board for the Price Guide feature should contact Jim Kuhoric via email: *jimkuhoric@bleedingcool.com*

San Diego Comic Con 2013 Price Guide

SDCC COMICS

Absolution: Rubicon #1 Catfight Wraparound	$10
Aphrodite XI Cosplay #3	$22
Art Of Zenescope	$200
Aspen Splash Swimsuit Ebas	$40
Aspen Women #10	$65
Ballistic #1	$21
Banshee #1	$15
Batman #21	$30
Batman '66 #1	$25
Bob's Burgers Coloring Book	$25

Chew #35 Kill Bill variant	$44
Crossed #29 Reflections	$10
Day Men #1	$15
Deadpool Kills Deadpool #1	$43
Deadpool Vs Deadpool Ponies #1	$31
Extinction Parade #1 Army of the Bloodline Set	$30
Extinction Parade #1 Gold Leather	$85
Fathom #1	$30
Fathom #1 Century	$130
Fionna And Cake #1	$20
Fionna And Cake #6	$19
Futurama To Infinity	$95
Grimm Fairy Tales #86 variant	$250
Grimm Fairy Tales Unseen #1	$30
Grimm Fairy Tales Wonderland #12 variant	$225
Grimm Fairy Tales Wounded Warriors	$40
Hacktivist #1	$47
He Man Comic #1 & Lanyard	$35
Hunters #3	$53
Justice League #22	$21
Lazarus #2 Retailer	$15

Legend Of Korra #1	$12
Masters Of The Universe Origin Of Skeletor	$15
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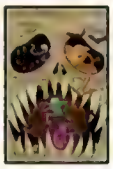

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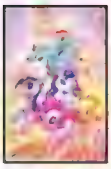

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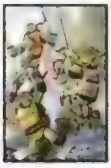

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